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on
The Art and Craft
of Writing

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О ТВОРЧЕСТВЕ И МАСТЕРСТВЕ

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MAXIM
GORKY



HOW I LEARNT TO WRITE

Comrades!

Wherever I have had an opportunity to talk to you, many have asked me verbally or in writing to say how I learnt to write. The same question has been put in letters from all parts of the U.S.S.R., sent by workers' and peasants' correspondents, army correspondents and in general by young people who have begun to write. Many have requested me to "compile a book on how stories should be written", or "develop a theory of literature", or "publish a text-book on literature". I cannot write such a text-book, and shall not be able to do so; besides, such books already exist, which, even if they are not very good, are useful nevertheless.

Those beginning to write must have a knowledge of the history of literature. In this respect they will find V. Keltuyal's *History of Literature*, published by Gosizdat*, of

* *Gosizdat*—State Publishing House, Moscow.—*Tr.*

help, a book with an excellent account of the way oral ("folk") and written ("literary") creativity has developed. Whatever a man's craft, he should know the history of its development. If the workers engaged in any industry, or, better still, at any factory knew how it arose and gradually developed, how production has been perfected, they would work better, with a fuller understanding of their labour's significance for the history of culture, and with more enthusiasm.

A knowledge of foreign literature is also necessary, because in its essence literary creativity is the same in all lands and with all peoples. This is not only a matter of formal, external links, such as Pushkin having provided Gogol with the theme of *Dead Souls*, whilst Pushkin himself probably took it from *A Sentimental Journey* by the English writer Laurence Sterne. Likewise, the similarity of subject in *Dead Souls* and *The Pickwick Papers* is of little importance. What is important is a realisation of the fact that, since times immemorial, a net has everywhere been woven to capture the souls of men, and, on the other hand, that always and everywhere there have been such who have made it the aim of their work to rid men of superstitions, prejudices and biases. It is important to know that, just as there have always been such that have encouraged indulgence towards trifles pleasing to men, there have also been rebels who have risen up against the base and the vile in the life around them. It is also important to realise that in the final analysis the rebels, who have shown men the way forward and have induced them to pursue that path, gain the upper hand over preachers of appeasement and reconciliation to the vile conditions created by class society, by bourgeois society, which has infected working people with the repulsive vices of greed, envy, sloth and aversion for labour.

The history of human labour and creativity is far more interesting and significant than the history of man; man dies before reaching the age of one hundred, whilst his works live through the centuries. The fabulous achievements of science and its rapid growth can be explained by the scientist knowing the history of his

speciality's development. Science and letters have much in common: in both a leading part is played by observation, comparison, and study; both the writer and the scientist must possess imagination and intuition.

Imagination and intuition help fill in the gaps in a chain of facts, thus enabling the scientist to evolve hypotheses and theories, which more or less effectively guide the mind's inquiries into nature's forces and phenomena. By gradually subordinating the latter, man's mind and will create human culture, which in effect is our "second nature".

This statement can be best borne out by two facts: on the basis of his study of the elements known at the time—iron, lead, sulphur, mercury, etc.—Dmitry Mendeleev, the celebrated chemist, created his Periodic Table of the Elements, which stated that there existed in Nature a number of elements as yet undiscovered; he also indicated the specific gravity of each of these unknown elements. These have all since been found, and, besides, Mendeleev's method has helped find a number of other elements whose existence he himself did not suspect.

Another fact: Honoré de Balzac, the French novelist and one of the greatest of writers, said in one of his books that he thought that certain potent secretions then unknown to science probably operate in the human organism and account for various of its psycho-physical features. Several decades later the discovery was made in the human organism of several previously unknown glands that produce hormones, thus leading to the creation of the highly important science of endocrine glands. Such blending of the creative activities of scientists and leading writers is by no means rare. Lomonosov and Goethe were poets and scientists at one and the same time, as was the novelist Strindberg, whose *Captain Kool* was one of the first to foresee nitrogen extraction from the atmosphere.

The art of literary creativity, which is concerned with the fashioning of characters and "types", calls for imagination and inventiveness. If, in depicting a shopkeeper, a civil servant, or a worker of his acquaintance, the writer has produced what is a more or less faithful photograph

of just one person, that will be nothing more than a photograph, without the least social or educative significance, and will do almost nothing to extend our knowledge of man or life.

If, however, the writer proves able to summarise the most characteristic class features, habits, tastes, gestures, beliefs and manner of speech peculiar to twenty, fifty, or even a hundred shopkeepers, civil servants or workers, proves able to epitomise and condense them in the person of a single shopkeeper, civil servant or worker, he thereby creates a *type*, and that is art. The range of his observations and his rich experience of life often give the artist a power which outweighs his private attitude towards the facts, in other words, his subjectiveness. Subjectively Balzac stood for a bourgeois social order, but in his works he depicted the vile and vulgar nature of the petty bourgeoisie with an amazing and ruthless starkness. There have been many instances of writers being objective historians of their class and their time, their works in such cases being equal in objectivity to those of learned naturalists, who study the conditions in which animals feed and exist, the causes of their reproduction and disappearance, and describe their savage struggle for survival.

In the struggle for existence, man's instinct of self-defence has developed two powerful creative forces in him—knowledge and imagination. Knowledge, the faculty of cognition, means the ability to observe, compare, study natural phenomena and the facts of social life; in a word, knowledge means thinking. Imagination is, in its essence, also a mode of thinking about the world, but thinking in terms of images. It may be said that imagination means the ability to attribute to things and to the elemental forces of nature human qualities, feelings and even intentions.

We hear and speak of the wind “whining” or “moaning”, the moon’s “pensive light”, a “babbling” brook, a “murmuring” stream and many other similar expressions, which are aimed at making natural phenomena more vivid.

This is called anthropomorphism, from two Greek words: *anthropos*, which means man, and *morphe*, mean-

ing form or image. It will be noticed here that man has a way of attributing his human qualities to everything he sees; he imagines these things and associates them with natural phenomena, with everything created by his labour and his mind. There are people who think that anthropomorphism should have no place in literature, and even consider it detrimental to it, but these same people say "the frost pinched his ears", "the sun smiled", "May came round", and even speak of "villainous weather", though it would be hard to use a moral yardstick with reference to the weather.

It was asserted by Xenophanes, an ancient Greek philosopher, that if animals possessed the gift of imagination, lions would think that God was a kind of enormous and invincible lion, rats would picture him as a rat, and so on. The mosquito god would probably be a mosquito, while the god of the tubercle bacillus would be a bacillus. Man has made his god omniscient, omnipotent and omnific, in other words, has endowed him with the finest of his own aspirations. God is but a fabrication, born of the "drab poverty of life" and man's vague urge to make life richer, easier, more just and goodly. God has been raised high above humdrum life, because men's and women's finest qualities and desires found no place in the realities of life, which was the scene of an arduous struggle for a bare subsistence.

We see that when those in the van of the working class realised how life should be refashioned so that their best qualities could find untrammelled development, God became a superfluous thing that had outlived itself. It was no longer necessary to sublime the best in them in the image of a god, because that best could now be converted into living and earthly reality.

God has been created in the same manner as literary "types" have, in accordance with the laws of abstraction and concretisation. Characteristic exploits performed by a variety of heroes are condensed or "abstracted" and then given concrete shape in the person of a single hero, let us say Hercules or the legendary Russian peasant hero Ilya Muromets; traits peculiar to any merchant, nobleman or peasant are similarly "abstracted" and then *typified* in

the person of some one merchant, nobleman or peasant—in other words, now a *literary type* is created.

It is in this fashion that Faust, Hamlet and Don Quixote were created, Tolstoi produced his meek and God-fearing Platon Karatayev,* Dostoyevsky his Karamazovs and Svidrigailov, and Goncharov his Oblomov.

These people never existed in reality, but there have been many like them, only more petty and with less singleness of make-up. Just as builders erect towers and temples out of individual bricks, writers have fashioned literary types, who epitomise certain human qualities. We call a liar a Khlestakov,** while a sycophant is called a Molchalin*** a hypocrite is a Tartuffe, and a jealous man, an Othello. This list might be extended.

There are two currents, or schools, in literature: romanticism and realism. By the latter is meant a truthful, unvarnished presentation of people and their conditions of life. Several definitions of romanticism have been brought forward, but till now no precise or exhaustive definition has been evolved that will satisfy all historians of literature. Two sharply contrasting tendencies should be distinguished in romanticism, the passive and the active. Passive romanticism endeavours to reconcile man with his life by embellishing that life, or to distract him from the things around him by means of a barren introspection into his inner world, into thoughts of "life's insoluble problems", such as love, death and other imponderables, problems that cannot be solved by speculation or contemplation, but only by science. Active romanticism strives to strengthen man's will to live and raise him up against the life around him, against any yoke it would impose.

However, it is hard to say with sufficient precision whether such classics as Balzac, Turgenev, Tolstoi, Gogol, Leskov or Chekhov were romanticists or realists, for in

* *Platon Karatayev*—personage in Tolstoi's *War and Peace*.—Ed.

** *Khlestakov*—leading character in Gogol's comedy *The Inspector-General*.—Ed.

*** *Molchalin*—character in Griboyedov's comedy *Wit Works Woe*.—Ed.

great artists realism and romanticism seem to have blended. Balzac was a realist, but he also wrote novels such as *La peau de chagrin*, a story that is far removed from realism. Turgenev also wrote in a romantic vein, as did all our leading writers, from Gogol down to Chekhov and Bunin. This fusion of romanticism and realism is highly characteristic of our great writers, imbuing their works with an originality and a forcefulness that has exerted an ever mounting and telling influence on the literature of the entire world.

The relationship between realism and romanticism will be clearer to you, Comrades, if you consider the question: "Why does the urge to write arise?" There are two answers to this question, one of which has been given by a correspondent of mine aged 15, a worker's daughter. This is what she wrote in a letter to me:

I am 15, but even at so early an age a writer's talent has arisen in me, the cause of which has been an oppressively drab life.

It would have been, of course, more correct to say instead of *writer's talent*, simply *a desire to write* so as to light up and enrich an *oppressively drab life*. The question arises: what could one write about in conditions of that kind of life?

A reply to this question is provided by a number of nationalities living along the Volga, in the Urals area and in Siberia. But yesterday many of them did not possess an alphabet, yet many centuries before our days they enriched and beautified their *oppressively drab life* in the depth of their forests, amidst their marshlands, the arid steppes of the East and the *tundra* of the North by creating songs, tales, heroic legends and myths about gods. All this goes by the name of *religious creativity*, but in essence it belongs to the realm of art.

If my young correspondent really developed a talent—which I wish her from the bottom of my heart—she would probably write in a *romantic* vein; she would try to embellish her *oppressively drab life* with beautiful figments of the imagination and depict people as being better than they really are. Gogol is the author of *How Ivan Ivanovich Quarrelled with Ivan Nikiforovich, Old-*

Fashioned Landowners and *Dead Souls*, but he also wrote *Taras Bulba*. The former three works depict people with *dead souls* and portray the terrible truth, for such people lived in the past and still exist today. In describing such as these Gogol was a *realist*.

In *Taras Bulba* the Zaporozhye Cossacks were depicted as God-fearing, knightly and mighty men, who would lift their foes into the air on the points of their lances, though it is patent that the wooden shaft of a lance would snap under a man's weight. The kind of Cossack Gogol wrote of never existed in reality and the story is a piece of fanciful writing. In it, as in all of *Rudy Panko's* stories, Gogol was a romanticist, the probable reason of this being that he was weary of observing the *oppressively drab life* of *dead souls*.

Comrade Budyonny has taken Babel's* *Cavalry Army* to task, but in my opinion he has been wrong to do so. After all, Comrade Budyonny liked to bedeck not only his soldiers but his horses too. Babel has adorned his fighting men from within, and, I think, has done so in a finer and more truthful way than Gogol did with his Cossacks.

In many respects man is still a brute, but at the same time he is, in the cultural sense, a raw youth as yet, and it is useful to praise and embellish him a little. This builds up his self-respect and fosters his confidence in his creative powers. Besides, there is every reason to praise man, for everything that is good and socially valuable is created by his strength and his will.

Does that all mean that by what I have just said I assert the necessity of romanticism in literature? Yes, I stand for that necessity, but only given a certain highly important extension of the term.

Here is a cry coming to me from another correspondent, a young worker of seventeen: "I am so full of impressions that I can't help writing."

In this case the striving to write derives not from the "poverty" of life, but from its wealth, from an exuberance of impressions and an inner urge to describe them. The

* *Babel, I. E.* (1894-1941)—well-known Soviet writer.—*Ed.*

overwhelming majority of my youthful correspondents wish to write just because they are rich in impressions of life and cannot remain silent about what they have seen and experienced. Quite a number of "realists" will probably emerge from their ranks, but I think that their realism will be tinged with a certain romanticism, which is inevitable and lawful in a period of a healthy spiritual upsurge, and that is just what we are now living through.

And so to the question why I began to write I shall reply: because of the pressure exerted on me by an *oppressively drab life* and also because I was so full of impressions that I could not help writing. The former reason made me try to introduce into my *drab life* such imaginings as *The Tale of the Falcon and the Grass-Snake*, *The Legend of the Burning Heart*, and *The Stormy Petrel*, while the latter led me to writing stories of a "realistic" character, such as *Twenty-Six Men and a Girl*, *The Orlov Couple*, and *The Rowdy*.

The following should be remembered in connection with the question of our "romanticism". Until the appearance of Chekhov's *Muzhiks* and *In the Gully*, and Bunin's *Village* and all his stories about the peasantry, our literature of the nobility was fond of depicting the peasant, and indeed did so very skilfully, as a meek and patient man who aspired towards some kind of "Christ's truth" of the other world, something that had no roots in the real things of life, but was nevertheless dreamt of by peasants like Kalinych in Turgenev's story *Khor and Kalinych* and Platon Karatayev in Tolstoi's *War and Peace*. It was about twenty years prior to the abolition of serfdom that there appeared a tendency to depict the peasant as a meek and patient dreamer after "God's truth", although by that time the serf peasantry had already produced from their ignorant ranks such gifted industrialists as the Kokorevs, the Gubonins, the Morozovs and the like, and more and more frequent reference was being made in the press to that mighty and towering figure also brought forward by the peasantry—Lomonosov, the poet and leading scientist.

But yesterday lacking civil rights, manufacturers, ship-builders and merchants were now confidently making

room for themselves in life side by side with the nobility and, like freedmen in ancient Rome, sat at the same table as their former masters. By bringing forth such people from their midst, the peasantry were thereby displaying, as it were, their latent strength and talent. The literature produced by the nobility failed to recognise and depict, as the hero of the time, this newcomer, real, tangible, full of will-power and a thirst of life, builder, amasser of wealth and hard-headed man of affairs; instead, that literature went on lovingly depicting humble-spirited serfs, like the conscience-ridden Polikushka. In 1852 Lev Tolstoi wrote a melancholy sketch entitled *Morning of a Landowner*, with a splendid description of the way a kind-hearted and liberal master was distrusted by his serfs. In 1862 Tolstoi began his education of peasant children, his denial of science and progress, and his teaching that people should go to the muzhik to learn how to live properly; in the seventies he wrote his stories for "the people", depicting them as Christ-loving and romanticised peasants, and taught that village life is blessed and the peasant's tilling of the soil is sacred labour. Finally, in his story *Does a Man Need Much Earth?* he asserted that man needs only the six feet of earth required for a grave.

Concrete conditions were turning humble and Christ-loving people into builders of new forms of economic life, into petty bourgeois and men of big business, such as the greedy and clutching Razuvayevs and Kolupayevs depicted by Saltykov-Shchedrin and Gleb Uspensky. At the same time rebels and revolutionaries were coming into the picture. All these people, however, were unnoticed by the literature of the nobility. In *Oblomov*, one of the finest novels of our literature, Goncharov contrasted to a Russian nobleman, whose sheer laziness had reduced him to something close to idiocy, the figure of a German, and not one of those former Russian serfs among whom he, Goncharov, was living and who were already beginning to run the country's economic life. If writers from among the nobility described a revolutionary then that man was either a Bulgarian or a rebel in word alone, like Rudin. As a hero of the times, the

Russian of will and action found no reflection in literature, though outside men of letters' field of vision that Russian was rendering a fairly noisy account of himself with the aid of bombs. Much evidence could be adduced to show that an active and purposeful romanticism was alien to the literature of the Russian nobility. It was powerless to produce a Schiller, and, instead of *The Robbers*, gave superb depictions of *Dead Souls*, *A Living Corpse*, *A House of the Dead*, *Three Deaths*, and quite a number of other deaths. Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* was in all probability written in protest against Schiller's *Robbers*, his *Possessed* being the most talented and malicious of the numberless attempts made to denigrate the revolutionary movement of the seventies.

Active social-revolutionary romanticism was also alien to the literature of the *raznochinets** intellectuals. The *raznochinets* was too much concerned with his own fate and with finding his own place in the drama of life; he found himself between the hammer of the autocracy and the anvil of the "people".

Sleptsov's** *Hard Times* and Osipovich-Novodvorský's *Episode from the Life of One Neither Peacock nor Sparrow* were truthful and forceful stories of the tragedy of intelligent people who had no roots in life and were "neither peacocks nor sparrows", or of such that turned into smug philistines, the kind described by Kushchevsky*** and by Pomyalovsky**** that gifted, remarkably intelligent but insufficiently appreciated writer, in his *Molotov* and *Philistine Happiness*. Incidentally, both these stories have retained their interest for our times

* *Raznochinets*—the name given in the second half of the 19th century to any member of the Russian intelligentsia recruited from such sections of society as the peasantry, the clergy, the petty bourgeoisie and also containing *déclassé* noblemen.—Ed.

** *Sleptsov*, U. A. (1836-1878)—Russian revolutionary-democratic writer. His books, which described the life of the common people, were popular in the sixties of the last century.—Ed.

*** *Kushchevsky*, I. A. (1847-1876)—Russian democratic writer.—Ed.

**** *Pomyalovsky*, N. G. (1835-1863)—well-known Russian writer who was close to the revolutionary democrats. His novels dealt with the life of the *raznochinets* intelligentsia.—Ed.

when the philistine is again coming to life and is beginning, with a measure of success, to build up for himself a certain cheap prosperity in a country where the working class has paid in torrents of its blood for the right to build a socialist culture.

In their assiduous efforts to idealise rural life the so-called *Narodnik* writers, such as Zlatovratsky, Zasodimsky, Vologdin, Levitov, Nefedov, Bazhin, Nikolai Uspensky, Ertel, and in some degree Stanyukovich, Karonin-Petropavlovsky and many others, re-echoed the tone of writers from the nobility; these *Narodniks* saw in the peasant a natural socialist, who knew no other truth but that of the *mir*, the village community. Herzen, that brilliantly gifted nobleman, was the first to foster this attitude towards the peasantry, and his stand was followed up by N. Mikhailovsky, who invented two truths—the “real” and that of “justice”. The influence the *Narodnik* writers exerted on “society” was weak and short-lived, their “romanticism” differing from that of their colleagues of the nobility merely in paucity of talent, and their dreamers—peasants like Minai and Mityai—were but feeble copies of Polikushka, Kalynych and Karatayev and other similarly pious muzhik characters.

There were two very important writers at the time, who were close to the group just mentioned, but were far more far-sighted socially and possessed far more talent than the *Narodniks*, indeed more than all of them taken together. These were D. Mamin-Sibiryak and Gleb Uspensky, who were the first to take note of, and describe the differences between, urban and village life, between the industrial worker and the peasant. In this, particular discernment was displayed by Gleb Uspensky, who wrote two outstanding books: *The Morals of Rasteryayev Street* and *The Power of the Soil*, the social value of which still endures; in general, Uspensky’s stories retain their educative significance, and our young writers would do well to learn from his ability to observe and from his extensive knowledge of the life around him.

In his stories *Muzhiks*, *In the Gully*, which I have already mentioned, and also in *The New Villa* Anton Chekhov showed himself violently opposed to any ideal-

isation of the peasant; even greater hostility to this tendency was displayed by Ivan Bunin in his short novel *The Village* as well as in all his peasant stories. Highly characteristic is the fact that peasant writers like Semyon Podyachev* and Ivan Volnov,** the latter a highly gifted and developing writer, describe village life in terms just as unsparing. Themes such as rural life and the peasant's mentality are highly topical and important today, something that our young writers should realise in full.

From all that has just been said it is clear that our literature has not yet known "romanticism" as the teaching of an active attitude towards life, of the dignity of labour and the will to live, as the source of inspiration in the building-up of new forms of life and as hate of the old world, whose evil heritage we are eliminating so painfully. This teaching is vitally needed if we really wish to preclude any revival of philistinism and further, through philistinism, of the class state and the exploitation of the workers and peasants by parasites and plunderers. This is a "resurrection" all enemies of the Soviet Union are dreaming of; they are waging an economic blockade of the Soviet Union with the specific aim of forcing the working class to restore the old class state. The worker-writer should realise with the utmost clarity that the contradiction between the working class and the bourgeoisie cannot be bridged and that only complete victory or utter destruction can solve that contradiction. It is from that tragic contradiction, from the arduous nature of the task so inexorably imposed upon the working class by the course of history, that there should arise an active "romanticism", that creative urge, that audacity of will and mind, and those revolutionary qualities which have always marked the Russian revolutionary working man.

I am, of course, aware that the road to freedom is not easy and that the time has not yet come for tea-drinking all one's life in the pleasant company of pretty girls or for lolling before a mirror, lost in admiration of one's

* *Podyachev, S. P.* (1866-1934)—Russian Soviet writer.—*Ed.*

** *Volnov, I. Y.* (1885-1931)—writer who portrayed morals and life of Russian peasantry following the abolition of serfdom.—*Ed.*

good looks, something that quite a number of young people are prone to indulging in. The realities of life tend more and more to drive home the fact that under present-day conditions a life of peaceful seclusion cannot be built, that living in solitude or even with a chosen partner will not bring happiness, that philistine prosperity cannot be lasting, for the foundations of that kind of well-being are crumbling away all over the world. This is borne out very convincingly by a number of symptoms: the malice, gloom, and alarm that have come over philistines the world over; the lamentations coming from the literature of Europe; the desperate gaiety the wealthy philistine is having recourse to in the vain hope of stifling his fear of the morrow, and, finally, a morbid craving for low pleasures, the development of sexual aberrations and the spread of crime and suicides. The "old world" is indeed mortally sick, and we must hasten to renounce that world to avoid being affected by its noxious exhalations.

While a moral dry-rot has come over man in Europe, a firm confidence in our strength and the power of the collective is developing among the working masses in our country. You, young people, should know that this confidence always arises as one overcomes obstacles along the road to a better life, and that confidence of this kind is the mightiest of creative forces. You should also know that in that "old world" only science is humane and therefore indisputably of value. With the exception of the ideas of socialism all the "ideas" circulating in the "old world" have no humanity in them because in one way or another those ideas attempt to establish and justify the lawfulness of the "happiness" and power of individuals at the expense of the culture and liberty of the working masses.

I have no recollection of ever having complained about life in my youth. The people I lived among were fond of grumbling, but when I realised that they did so out of cunning so as to conceal their reluctance to help one another I tried to avoid imitating them. Very soon I saw that most given to grumbling were such that were incapable of putting up any resistance, people who could

not or would not work, and in general were prone to take it easy at the expense of their fellowmen.

In my time I experienced, in no small measure, a fear of life. Today I call such fear that of a blind man. Having lived, as I have had occasion to describe, in very arduous circumstances, I saw in my early years the senseless brutality practised by people, their mutual hostility, which I could not understand, and was amazed by the back-breaking toil imposed upon some and the gross prosperity enjoyed by others. At a very early age I understood that "the closer to God" religious people thought themselves, the farther they stood from those who worked for them and the more ruthlessly exacting they became towards the toilers. I must say that I witnessed far more of the abominations of life than you have occasion to see, and besides I saw them in far more repelling forms, for the philistine you now meet has been cowed by the Revolution and is far from confident of his right to be such as his nature would have him be. What I saw was philistinism absolutely certain that it was doing well and that its comfortable and untroubled life had been ordained for all time.

By that time I was already reading translations of foreign novels, including books by such splendid writers as Dickens and Balzac, and historical novels by Ainsworth, Bulwer-Lytton and Dumas. These depicted men of strong will and indomitable character, whose joys and sufferings were different from those I saw and knew, and whose animosities derived from important differences. All around me, however, were mean and petty people, whose greed, enmity and malice, fights and litigations sprang from, say, a neighbour's son having broken a hen's leg or smashed a window-pane, or because a pie had been ruined, the cabbage-soup had been over-boiled or the milk had turned sour. They could grieve for hours over the fact that the shopkeeper had added another kopek to the price of a pound of sugar or a yard of calico. Any petty mishap that had befallen a neighbour would give them real delight, which they would conceal behind a show of sympathy. I saw very well that it was a kopek coin that shone in the philistine's heaven and aroused

petty and sordid enmity among men. Pots and pans, poultry and cabbages, pancakes and church-going, birthdays and funerals, guzzling and swinishness—such was the content of the life lived by those I grew up amongst. That disgusting existence evoked in me now a numbing torpor, now an urge to run into mischief so as to arouse myself from torpor. It was probably about such tedium that a 19-year-old correspondent wrote to me about recently in the following terms:

With every fibre in my being I hate the deadening tedium that centres around the kitchen, gossiping and yelping.

It was tedium of that very description that drove me into all kinds of mischief: I would climb on the roof and stuff pieces of rag into chimney-pots, throw handfulls of salt into boiling cabbage-soup, blow clouds of dust into clocks, and in general go in for what is called hooliganism. The reason of this was that while I had an urge to feel I was a living person I was unable to find other ways of convincing myself of the fact. My feeling was that I had lost my way in a thick forest full of fallen tree-trunks, dense undergrowth and rotting leaves into which I sank to the knees.

I remember the following incident: gangs of Siberia-bound convicts would be taken under armed escort along the street I lived in, from the prison to the landing-stage, where they would be taken on board river-steamers travelling along the Volga and the Kama. I felt strangely attracted to that drab and dingy crowd; perhaps this sprang from a feeling of envy that they were a company who, though some were in chains and all were under armed guard, nevertheless had some destination, while I was living like some solitary rat in a cellar, and had to toil in my filthy kitchen with its brick floor. One day a large group of fettered convicts were being taken to the riverside. Two criminals fettered hand and foot were marching just off the pavement, one of them a burly, black-bearded man with eyes like a horse's, a livid scar along his forehead and a torn ear—a horrible figure. With eyes fixed on the man, I walked along the pavement abreast of him. Suddenly he called out to me in a loud and cheerful voice, "Say, young chap, come and join us!"

Strangely drawn towards him, I ran up to the man, but one of the armed guards cursed me for a fool and thrust me back. Had he not done so I would have followed that horrible man as though in a dream, just because he was so out of the ordinary, so unlike the men I knew. Fear-some and fettered though he was, I felt drawn towards another kind of life. I could not soon forget the man and his merry, kindly voice. Associated with him is another, equally strong impression of those days. I had somehow got hold of a thick book, the beginning of which had been torn off and lost, and I began to read it. I could make nothing of the sense with the exception of a story, one page long, about a king who wanted to knight a simple archer, to which the archer replied in verse:

Then let me live and die a yeoman still:
So was my father, so must live his son.
For 'tis more credit to men of base degree,
To do great deeds, than men of dignity.

I copied out these rather cumbrous lines and for many years they served me in the manner a staff serves the traveller or perhaps like a shield that defended me against the temptations and the mean advice provided by the philistines, who at that time were the "salt of the earth". I suppose many young people come across lines which fill their imagination with a kind of motive force, as the wind fills a vessel's sails.

It was about ten years later that I learnt that these lines came from *The Comedy of the Merry Archer George Greene and Robin Hood*, written in the 16th century by Robert Greene, one of Shakespeare's forerunners. I was delighted by this discovery, and felt an even greater love of literature, which since ancient times has been people's true friend and helper in their arduous life.

Yes, comrades, I have had ample experience of fear of the boorishness and cruelty of life, and once even went so far as to attempt suicide, something that for many years I could not recollect without a feeling of burning shame and self-contempt.

I got rid of that fear when I realised that people were

more ignorant than evil, that I was intimidated not by them or by life, but by my social and other kinds of illiteracy, by my defencelessness and helplessness against life. That was precisely how matters stood. I think that you should give this matter good thought, because the moans and complaints coming from certain people amongst you stem from nothing but their sense of defencelessness, their lack of confidence in their ability to combat everything the "old world" uses to oppress man from without and within.

You should realise that people like me were solitary in those days, stepsons of "society", whereas you already number hundreds and belong to a working class which is conscious of its strength, is in possession of power and is rapidly learning to give full credit to the useful labour of individuals. In our workers' and peasants' government you have a power which should and can help you to develop your abilities to the utmost, something that it is gradually doing, and would do far more successfully if the bourgeoisie—its bitter foe and yours—did not hamper its life and work.

You must build up a sense of confidence in yourselves and your strength, a confidence which is achieved by overcoming obstacles and steeling the will. You must learn to eradicate from within yourselves and in your surroundings the mean and vile heritage of the past, for otherwise how will you be able "to renounce the old world" (from the words of *The Workers' Marseillaise*, a Russian revolutionary song dating back to 1875.—*Tr.*). You cannot sing that song unless you have the strength and the desire to act in the way it teaches. Even a minor victory over oneself makes one far stronger. You know very well how training the body gives a man greater health, agility and staying power; the mind and the will should get the same kind of training.

Here is an instance of the remarkable achievements such training can bring about: a short while ago a woman was exhibited in Berlin, who could, while holding two pencils in each hand and another between the teeth, simultaneously write five words in five different languages. This is something that might seem unbeliev-

able, not only because it is hard in a physical sense, but also because it calls for an extraordinary division of thought. It is nevertheless a fact. On the other hand, this fact goes to show how brilliant endowments can be wasted in chaotic bourgeois society, where to attract attention it is necessary to walk the streets on one's hands, set up speed records of little or no practical value, play chess matches simultaneously against twenty opponents, perform fantastic acrobatic and verse-compiling stunts, and in general invent all kinds of publicity-winning and showy performances to tickle the sensations of *blasé* and bored people.

You, young people, should know that everything really valuable and permanently useful and beautiful which mankind has achieved in the sphere of science, art and technology has been created by individuals working under inexpressibly arduous conditions, in the teeth of "society's" profound ignorance, the church's violent hostility, the capitalists' cupidity, and the capricious demands of "patrons" of the arts and sciences. One should bear in mind that there have been many ordinary working men among the creators of culture, as for instance the great physicist Faraday and the inventor Edison; that the spinning jenny was invented by Arkwright, who was a barber; that one of the finest creators of artistic pottery was Bernard Palissy, who was a blacksmith; that Shakespeare, the greatest dramatist the world has known, was an ordinary actor, as was Molière. Hundreds of similar examples might be cited of the way people have been able to develop their abilities.

All this proved possible for individuals who did not enjoy the benefits of the huge stock of scientific knowledge and technical contrivances now in mankind's possession. Think how easier it has become to conduct cultural work in our country, where we are striving for the complete emancipation of the people from senseless labour, from cynical exploitation of the workers, an exploitation which brings forth a rapidly degenerating wealthy class and, besides, threatens the toiling class with degeneration.

You are confronted with a great and perfectly clear task—that of "renouncing the old world" and creating a

new. This has been begun. After the example set by our working class, that process is developing on all sides, and will go on developing, no matter what obstacles the old world may place in its way. Working people all over the world are rolling up their sleeves in preparation for the job. An atmosphere of sympathy is being created around the work of individuals, who no longer feel isolated fragments of a collective, but its vanguard, which voices its creative will.

With a target like this one, set so boldly for the first time, there can be no room for questions such as "What is to be done?" "It is hard to live," some say. Is it so very hard, after all? Is it not hard because your requirements have grown and you need things your fathers never thought of and never saw? Perhaps your demands have become excessive?

I am aware, of course, that among you there are many who understand the joy and poetry of collective work, and aspire not towards amassing millions of kopeks but towards destroying the evil power the kopek wields over man, who is the greatest miracle in the world and the creator of all miracles in that world.

I shall now reply to the question as to how I learnt to write.

I gathered impressions both directly from life and from books. The former may be compared to raw material, the latter to semi-manufactured material, or, to put the matter in rougher but plainer terms, in the former instance I had to deal with the animal, and in the latter, with its excellently dressed hide. I am greatly indebted to foreign literature, especially to that of France.

My grandfather was cruel and miserly, but I did not understand him properly till I had read Balzac's *Eugénie Grandet*. Eugénie's father, old Grandet, was also cruel and miserly, and bore a resemblance to my grandfather, but he was more stupid and less interesting than my grandfather was. Compared with this Frenchman, an old Russian I did not love stood to advantage. This did not make me change my attitude towards him, but I had made

a great discovery, namely, that *books were able to reveal to me something that I had not seen or known in man.*

George Eliot's dull novel *Middlemarch* and books by Auerbach and Spielhagen showed me that people lived in English and German provinces in a way that was not quite the pattern of life in Zvezdinskaya Street in Nizhni-Novgorod, but was not much better. They spoke of much the same things—their English and their German kopeks, the need to fear the Lord and love Him, but, just like the inhabitants of our street, they disliked one another, especially people cast in a different mould, who in one way or another differed from the majority around them. I was not seeking for points of similarity between foreigners and Russians; no, I was out to discover differences, but I found similarity nevertheless.

The bankrupt merchants Ivan Shchurov and Yakov Kotelnikov, who were my grandfather's cronies, spoke of the same things and in the same way as people did in Thackeray's *Uanity Fair*. I learnt to read and write from the Psalter and loved the book, for it speaks in a beautiful and musical language. When Yakov Kotelnikov, my grandfather and other old men complained to each other of their children, I thought of King David's complaints to God about his son, the unduteous Absalom, and it seemed to me that these old men were not speaking the truth when they claimed that people in general and young people in particular were living ever worse lives, were becoming more stupid and lazy, and were losing their fear of the Lord. Dickens's hypocrites said exactly the same things.

After I had done some careful listening to arguments between sectarian dogmatists and Orthodox priests, I discovered that both clutched at words in the same way as churchmen in other countries did, that for all churchmen words were a way of keeping others in curb, and that there were writers who were very much like churchmen. In this resemblance I soon felt something suspicious, if interesting.

There was, of course, no system or consistency in my reading, and everything was a matter of accident. Victor Sergeyev, my employer's brother, was fond of reading

French "yellowback" novels by Xavier de Montépin, Gaboriau, Zaccane, and Bouvier, and, after reading these books, lighted upon Russian books which ridiculed and gave hostile depictions of "nihilist-revolutionaries". I also read books by Krestovsky, Stebnitsky-Leskov, Klyushnikov and Pisemsky. I found it interesting to read of people who had almost nothing in common with those I lived amongst but were rather kindred to the convict who had invited me to come and join him. Of course, I could not understand wherein lay the "revolutionariness" of these people, which formed part of the authors' intentions, for they tarred all "revolutionaries" with the same brush.

I hit upon Pomyalovsky's stories *Molotov* and *Philistine Happiness*, which showed me the "oppressively drab life" of philistine existence and the paltriness of philistine happiness. I felt, though in a vague fashion, that the sombre "nihilists" were in some way better than the prosperous Molotov. After Pomyalovsky I read an awfully dull book by Zarubin entitled *The Dark and Light Sides of Russian Life*; I failed to discover any light sides in the book, but the dark sides became clearer and more repulsive to me.

I read poor books beyond count, but even such were of use to me. The seamy side of life is something one should know just as well as its sunnier aspects. One must have the greatest possible amount of knowledge. The more varied one's experience, the greater the stature one acquires and the wider the field of vision.

Foreign literature provided me with copious material for comparisons and astonished me by the skill displayed in it. These books depicted people in so living and vivid a way that they actually seemed tangible to me; I always found these people more active than I did Russians—they talked less and did more.

A real and profoundly formative influence was exerted on me by the "big" French writers—Stendhal, Balzac and Flaubert, and I would advise all "beginners" to read these authors. They are, indeed, artists of genius and superb masters of form, the like of whom Russian literature does not yet possess. I read them in the Russian, but that did not prevent me from sensing the power of French writ-

ing. After a multitude of "boulevard" novels, after Mayne Reid, James Fenimore Cooper, Gustave Aimard and Ponson du Terrail, stories by these great writers produced on me the impression of a miracle.

I remember reading Flaubert's *Un cœur simple* one Trinity Sunday, ensconced on the roof of a shed where I had found refuge from merry-makers. I was amazed by the narrative, and felt like one bereft of sight and hearing; the noisy festival in progress all around was shut off by the figure of a common woman, a cook, who had performed neither outstanding deeds nor crimes of any kind. It was hard to understand why simple words so familiar to me, which had been put into a story of the "ordinary" life of a cook, should have stirred me so. I seemed for all the world to discern some kind of magic in the effect the book was having on me and I will confess that I several times held the pages up to the light, like a savage, without reflecting on what I was doing, in an effort to find between the lines some key to the mystery.

I was familiar with dozens of books which depicted mysterious and sanguinary crimes, but when I read Stendhal's *Italian Chronicles* I could not make out how it was all done. Here was a man who described cruel acts and vengeful murderers, and yet I read his stories as though they were *Lives of the Saints* or as if I were hearing *A Dream of Our Lady*, in which the Mother of God goes down into Hell to comfort those undergoing torment there.

I was absolutely amazed when in Balzac's *La peau de chagrin* I read through the pages describing a banquet given by a banker, where about two dozen guests were all talking at the same time, creating a hubbub that seemed to hit upon my eardrums. What was more important was that I not only heard but actually saw each of the guests speaking; I could see their eyes, smiles and gestures, although Balzac describes neither the features nor the appearance of the banker's guests.

The skill revealed by Balzac and other French writers in the art of depicting people through the medium of words and the art of making their speech living and audible, their consummate skill in creating dialogues,

always overwhelmed me. Balzac's books seem to have been done in oils, and when I first saw paintings by Rubens I immediately thought of Balzac. When I read Dostoyevsky's crazy books I cannot help thinking that he owes very much to this great master of the novel. I liked too the tersely-worded novels of the Goncourts, as incisive as drawings done in pen, and the gloomy writings of Zola, like impressive canvases rendered in sombre colours. Hugo's novels failed to carry me away, and I read even *Quatre-vingt-treize* with indifference. It was only later, when I got to know Anatole France's *Les dieux ont soif*, that I realised the cause of that indifference. I read Stendhal only after I had learnt to hate many things, and his unruffled speech and sceptical smile fortified me in my hatred.

What follows from the above is that it was from French authors that I learnt how to write. This was accidental, but the results proved beneficial, which is why I would advise young writers to study French so as to read the great masters in the original and learn the art of words from them.

It was much later that I read the great men of Russian letters—Gogol, Tolstoi, Turgenev, Goncharov, Dostoyevsky and Leskov. Without any doubt, Leskov had an influence on me through his amazing knowledge and wealth of language. He is an excellent writer with an intimate insight into Russian life, and one who has not received the recognition he deserves in our literature. Chekhov said that he was much indebted to Leskov. I think that A. Remizov* could say the same.

I have mentioned these mutual links and influences so as to repeat that a knowledge of the development of foreign and Russian literature is a writer's "must".

At about the age of 20 I realised that I had seen, heard and lived through much that people could and should be told of. It seemed to me that I knew and felt

* *Remizov, A. M.*—Russian writer who followed in the tradition established by Leskov in depicting patriarchal Russia and the world of the Church, as well as in the use of ornamentally stylised speech.—*Ed.*

certain things differently from the way other people did; this both perturbed me and put me in an unquiet and talkative frame of mind. Even when reading books by such masters as Turgenev, it sometimes occurred to me that I could perhaps say something about the main characters of, say, *A Sportsman's Sketches* otherwise than Turgenev had done. By that time I had gained quite a reputation as a narrator and was attentively listened to by longshoremen, bakers, vagabonds, carpenters, railway workers, pilgrims and in general by all those I was living among. While I was retelling the contents of books I had read, I more and more frequently caught myself modifying the plot, distorting what I had read, and adding things culled from my own experience of life. That was because the facts of life and literature had become fused in my mind. A book is just as much a phenomenon of life as man is; it is also a living and speaking fact, and it is much less of a "thing" than all the other things that man has created or is creating.

Intellectuals who had heard me gave me the following advice: "You must write. Try your hand at it."

I often felt intoxicated, and experienced attacks of volubility, and a gush of words, from an urge to give expression to all that oppressed or gladdened me; I was eager to "get things off my chest". There were moments of torment from the tension within me, moments when a lump stood in my throat and I wanted to cry out that my friend Anatoly, a glass-blower, was a lad of talent but would perish if no help were forthcoming; that the street-walker Theresa was a fine person and it was unjust that she was a prostitute, which was something the students who visited her did not see, just as they did not see that the old woman Matitsa, who begged for a living, had far more brains than the young and well-read *accoucheuse* Yakovleva.

In secret from even my intimate friend, the student Gury Pletnyov, I wrote verses about Theresa and Anatoly, verses to the effect that it was not so as to carry torrents of filthy water into the bakers' cellars that the snow melted in spring; that the Volga was a beautiful river; that the pretzel-baker Kuzin was a Judas, and life

was a slough of filth and desolation that mutilated the soul.

I had a facile pen for verse but I saw that what I wrote was abominable and despised myself for my lack of skill and talent. I read Pushkin, Lermontov, Nekrasov, and Kurochkin's translations of Béranger with a clear realisation that I bore not the least resemblance to any of these poets. I could not make up my mind to write prose, which seemed to me more difficult than verse and called for a special keenness of sight, a power of discerning and taking note of things that others could not see, and a terse and pithy style. Nevertheless, I began to try my hand at prose-writing, selecting, however, the medium of "rhythmical" prose, since I found ordinary prose beyond my capacities. My efforts to write in simple style led to results both sad and ridiculous. It was in rhythmical prose that I wrote a huge "poem", *Song of the Old Oak*. It took V. G. Korolenko only a dozen words to pull to pieces this clumsy writing, in which, as I remember, I voiced thoughts that had arisen in me in connection with an article "The Whirlpool of Life", published, if I am not in error, in the *Znaniye* magazine and dealing with the theory of evolution. The only thing in it I have retained in my memory is the sentence, "I have come into this world so as to disagree." I must say that I really did not agree with the theory of evolution.

Korolenko, however, did not succeed in curing me of my predilection for rhythmical prose, and when five years later he had words of praise for my story *Grandfather Arkhip*, he said that I should not have prinked up the story with "something resembling verse". I did not believe him at first but when I looked through the story at home I found to my regret that a whole page, a description of a downpour of rain in the steppe, had been written in that accursed "rhythmical" prose, which dogged my footsteps for a long time and seeped its way, unwanted and out of place, into my stories. . . . In general I tried to make use of an "elegant" style. Here is an instance: "The drunk man stood embracing the lamp-post, a smile on his face, examining his flickering shadow." The night, incidentally, as I myself had written, was windless and

moonlit; in those times street lanterns were not lit on such nights, and besides even were the lantern lit, the man's shadow would be a steady one if there was no wind. Such discrepancies and inaccuracies were to be met in each of my stories, for which I would revile myself in no uncertain terms.

"The sea was smiling," I wrote, and for a long time thought that it was good to say so. In my pursuit of beauty I was constantly at variance with precision of description and had a way of misplacing things and describing people inaccurately.

"Your oven does not stand as it should," Lev Tolstoi once said to me regarding my story *Twenty-Six Men and a Girl*. It transpired that the oven fire could not have lit up the bakers' faces in the fashion I had described. Speaking of Medynskaya in my *Foma Gordeyev*, Chekhov remarked, "She seems to have three ears—one even on her chin—look", and indeed it was all too true, so incorrect was the way she was facing the light.

Such errors, petty though they may seem, are of great importance, for they transgress the truth of art. In general, it is a very difficult thing to find precise words and place them in such a way as to express much in the fewest number of words, to be sparing of words and yet give boundless sweep to thought, to create living pictures through the agency of words, and define tersely a character's chief trait, immediately engraving on the reader's mind that character's manner and tone of speech. It is one thing to lend "colour" to people and things through the medium of words, and quite another matter to depict them vividly, in "three dimensions" as it were, so that they become physically tangible, like the characters in *War and Peace*. . . .

When, on one occasion I had to give a thumb-nail sketch of the appearance of a provincial townlet in central Russia, I sat for about three hours before I was able to produce the following:

"The undulating valley was criss-crossed by dreary roads, so that the gay-coloured town of Okurov was like a bright toy on a broad and wrinkled palm."

I thought I had done a piece of good writing, but when

the story was published I realised that it was all like decorated gingerbread or a picture on a chocolate box.

In general, words should be used with the severest accuracy. Here is an instance from another sphere. "Religion is opium," it has been said. But opium is used by doctors as an anodyne, so that it is a good thing. The fact that opium is smoked like tobacco, that opium-smoking kills people, and that opium is a poison far more noxious than alcohol is something that the masses do not know.

My setbacks always put me in mind of the poet's sorrowful words: "There is no torment in the world more exquisite than the torment of words." But that is something that has been discussed far better than I am able to by A. G. Gornfeld in a booklet entitled *The Torment of Words*, published by Gosizdat in 1927, a very fine work that I recommend to the attention of my young fellow-writers.

I think it was the poet Nadson who said, "Our language is cold and pitiful", and the poet has been rare who has failed to complain of the "poverty" of language.

It seems to me that these complaints have been directed against the "poverty" not so much of the Russian language but of human language in general and are due to the existence of feelings and thoughts that words can neither detect nor express. It is of such things that Gornfeld's book speaks so well. But, apart from things that words cannot detect, the Russian language is one of inexhaustible wealth and is being enriched at a speed that amazes. To establish the rapidity of the growth of our language, it is worth while to compare the stock of words used by Gogol and Chekhov, Turgenev and, for instance, by Bunin, Dostoyevsky and, let us say, Leonid Leonov.* The latter has himself stated in the press that he derives from Dostoyevsky, but he might have said that in certain

* *Leonov, L. M.* (born 1899)—prominent Russian Soviet writer and Lenin Prize winner.—*Ed.*

respects—and I shall appeal to the appraisal of the mind—he stems from Lev Tolstoi too. However, both these links are such that they testify only to the significance of the young writer and in no wise detract from his originality. In his novel *The Thief* he has, beyond a shadow of doubt, displayed an amazing wealth of language. He has created a number of highly felicitous words of his own, and, besides, the construction of his novel is striking in its complexity and fancifulness. As I see it, Leonov is a man with a message of his own, one that is highly original; he has just commenced delivering it, and neither Dostoyevsky nor anybody else can hamper him in this.

It will be in place to remind you that language is created by the people. To speak of the language of literature and that of the people is merely a way of saying that one is “raw material” while the other has been worked on by the masters. Pushkin was the first to fully realise this, and it was he, too, who showed how the speech material provided by the people should be used and worked on.

The artist is the sensitive recipient of all that affects his country and his class—its ear, eye and heart; his is the voice of his time. He is in duty bound to know as much as he can, and the better he knows the past, the better he will understand the present, and the more deeply and keenly will he realise the universal revolutionariness of our time and the scope of the tasks confronting it. A knowledge of the people's history is essential, and so is a knowledge of its social and political mode of thought. Men of learning—historians of culture and ethnographers—have pointed out that this thinking finds expression in fairytales, legends, proverbs and sayings. It is sayings and proverbs that in actual fact express the way the masses think, in a fashion most instructive and complete; tyro writers should get a knowledge of that material not only because it provides superb instruction in sparingness of words, pithiness and imagery but for the following reason: the overwhelming majority of the population of the Land of Soviets is made up of peasants, that clay out of which history has moulded working men, town-dwell-

ers, merchants, priests, officials, noblemen, savants and artists. The peasant mind has been under the continuous impact of those who controlled the state church and the various sects that broke away from that church. For centuries the peasants have been taught to think in terms of ready-made and set forms, such as sayings and proverbs, most of which are nothing but teachings of the church couched in a compressed form. . . .

When I read books written by "conservatives", by those who defended the autocracy, I found in them nothing that was new to me, because each of the pages reproduced on a wider scale—in *extenso*—some proverb I had known since childhood. It was obvious to me that all the profound wisdom of the conservatives—K. Leontyev, K. Pobedonostsev and the like—was imbued with that "wisdom of the people" which epitomised the church spirit.

. . . In general, proverbs and sayings succinctly sum up the social and historical experience accumulated by the working people, and the writer stands in absolute need of material that will teach him to compress words in the way fingers are compressed into a fist, and also to amplify words that others have compressed, and do so in a way that will reveal hidden meanings hostile to the tasks of the time, or simply outmoded.

I have learnt a great deal from proverbs, or, in other words, from thinking in terms of aphorisms. I call the following happening to mind: Yakov Soldatov, a friend of mine, a janitor and a man as fond of a joke as the next man, was once sweeping the street, wielding a new besom. Yakov gave me a look, winked with a merry eye and remarked:

"Whatever I do, I'll never get through; the more I sweep, the more keeps coming in."

I realised that he was saying no more than the truth. Even if the neighbours were to keep their part of the street in good order, the wind would bring dust from nearby streets; even if all the streets in the town were kept clean, clouds of dust would be coming in from the fields and roads round about or from neighbouring towns. Of course, one must keep the area round one's

house tidy, but one's labour will yield more results if it is extended to the entire street, the whole town, and the whole world.

It is in this fashion that a maxim can be built up. Here is an instance of how a maxim comes into being. When on one occasion cholera broke out in Nizhni-Novgorod, one of the inhabitants began to spread rumours that the doctors were doing away with the sick. Governor Baranov gave orders for his arrest and had him sent to work as an attendant in a hospital for cholera cases. It was said that after a while the erstwhile rumour-monger expressed thanks to the governor for the lesson he had been given, to which the governor retorted:

"When the truth hits you in the eye, you stop lying!"

Baranov was a coarse kind of man, but far from stupid and, I think, was quite capable of saying such things. Besides, what difference does it make who said these words.

Such were the living thoughts that helped me to learn to think and write. In books I found thoughts similar to those I had heard from janitors and lawyers, from such that had lost caste and from all sorts and conditions of men, but in books these thoughts were clothed in other words, so it was in this wise that the facts of life and of literature complemented each other.

I have already spoken of the way in which men of letters create "types" and characters, but I might perhaps cite two interesting examples.

Goethe's *Faust* is a superb product of artistic creativity, which is always figment and fiction, or, to be more precise, a kind of conjecturing added to what is provided by life and at the same time a translation of thought into images. I was about twenty when I first read *Faust*, and some time later I discovered that about two hundred years before the German Goethe, an Englishman named Christopher Marlowe had written about Faust; that the Polish cheap and tawdry novel *Pan Twardowski* was also a kind of Faust, as was *Jean le trouveur*, a novel by the French writer Paul Musset; that all books about Faust sprang from a mediaeval legend about a man who, thirst-

ing after private happiness and power over other men and nature's secrets, sold his soul to the Devil. This legend developed from observations of life and the work done by alchemists who sought to transmute baser metals into gold and discover the elixir of life. Among these were dreamers of integrity and obsession-driven men, but there were also quacks and charlatans. It was the vainness of these individuals' efforts to achieve "supreme power" that was held up to ridicule in the story of the adventures of the mediaeval Doctor Faust, to supply whom with the gift of omniscience and immortality proved beyond the power of the Devil himself.

Another figure appeared at the side of the unhappy Faust, a figure familiar to all peoples: in Italy it was Pulcinella, in England Punch, in Turkey Karapet, and in our country Petrushka, everywhere the unconquerable hero of folk puppet-shows, who is always on top, out-witting the police, the clergy, even the Devil and death, and is himself deathless. Working folk saw in this naive and coarse figure the embodiment of themselves and of their confidence that in the long run they and they alone would overcome all and everything.

These two instances go once again to bear out what I have already said: "nameless" works, i.e., such that have been produced by people we know nothing of,* also obey the laws of abstraction, of traits and features characteristic of any social group, as well as the laws of the typification of these features in the person of a representative of that group. When the artist faithfully obeys those rules, he is able to create "types". It was in this way that Charles de Coster produced his *Thyl Ulenspiegel*, the national type of the Fleming, Romain Rolland—his Colas Breugnon, man of Burgundy, and Alphonse Daudet—his Tartarin the Provençal. Such vivid portrayals of "typical" people can be produced only given a keen eye, an ability to discern similarities and dissimilarities, and through constant and ceaseless study. Where there is no

* We are entitled to call such works "folk creations", since they probably developed in craft guilds to be staged on holidays.—*Author's note.*

precise knowledge, one has to use guesswork, and out of ten guesses nine are sure to be wrong.

I do not consider myself a master capable of creating characters and types equal in value to the types and characters of Oblomov, Rudin, Ryazanov* and the like. Nevertheless, to write *Foma Gordeyev* I had to see many a dozen scions of merchant houses who were out of tune with their fathers' lives and work and had a vague feeling that there was little sense in that kind of monotonous and "oppressively drab" life. It was from the midst of such as Foma Gordeyev, those condemned to a life of tedium that was an insult to them, people who had begun to think, that, on the one hand, toppers, hooligans and dissolutes emerged, and on the other such exceptions to the rule as the wealthy Savva Morozov, who financed publication of the Leninist *Iskra*; N. Meshkov, the Perm shipowner who gave financial backing to the Social-Revolutionaries, Goncharov, the factory-owner from Kaluga, N. Schmidt of Moscow and many others. It was from the same *milieu* that such leaders of culture emerged as Milyutin, mayor of Cherepovets, and a number of merchants from Moscow and the provinces, who displayed much skill and devotion in fostering science, art and other cultural activities. Mayakin, Foma's godfather, was also made up of petty features, of "proverbs", and I think I displayed a certain discernment therein: after 1905, when the dead bodies of workers and peasants paved the way to power for the Mayakins, the latter played quite an important part in the struggle against the working class, and even today still dream of returning to their old nests.

Young people have been asking me why I wrote of "down-and-outs".

The reason was simple enough: living as I was among petty philistines and surrounded by people obsessed by a striving to suck the life-blood of others, and to turn

* Very well portrayed by Sleptsov in *Hard Times* as a type of *raznochinets* intellectual.—*Author's note.*

that blood into kopeks and the kopeks into rubles, I, too, just like my 19-year-old correspondent, developed in every fibre of my being a healthy hatred for that mosquito-like existence of drab people who resembled one another like copper five-kopek coins minted in one and the same year.

To me vagabonds and tramps seemed people out of the common rut. They differed from the run of people because, through loss of caste and expulsion from their class, they had shed the most characteristic features of their former background.

Among the down-and-outs who inhabited the so-called Millionka in Nizhni-Novgorod there amicably lived cheek by jowl former well-to-do burgesses; my cousin Alexander Kashirin, a meek dreamer; Tontini, an Italian painter; a former Gymnasium teacher named Gladkov; a certain Baron B.; a whilom assistant-inspector of police who had done time for robbery, and a celebrated thief styled "Nikolka the General", whose real name was Van-der-Flit.

A motley crowd numbering about twenty and similar in nature lived at Steklyanny Zavod in Kazan, among them Radlov or Radunov the "Student"; an elderly rag-and-bone collector, who had served ten years of hard labour; Vaska Grachik, who had once been valet to Governor Andriyevsky; Rodziyevich, a Byelorussian, son of a priest, and an engine-driver; Davydov, a veterinary surgeon. Most of them were sickly people who drank more than was good for them and went in for fights, but there was among them a feeling of comradeship and mutual aid; they spent on collectively-consumed food and liquor whatever they were able to earn or steal. I saw that, though their life was harder than that of "ordinary folk", these people felt superior to the latter, for the reason that there was no cupidity about them; they did not trample one another under foot and did not put money aside. Some of these might have made some savings, for they still retained some vestiges of thriftiness and a love of an "orderly" life. They might have had savings because Vaska Grachik, an ingenious and successful thief, often brought his swag to Rodziyevich, the

"treasurer", for safe-keeping. The latter was a kind of general-manager of this down-and-out community, who was trusted by all, and was moreover a surprisingly mild and weak-willed man.

I can call several scenes to mind: on one occasion one of the fraternity brought along a pair of top-boots he had stolen. By common consent it was decided that they should be sold and the proceeds spent on liquor. However, Rodziyevich, who was ill at the time after a beating he had got at the police station, said that only the tops should be sold and the rest should be given to the "Student" whose boots were broken. "He'll catch his death of cold," he said, "and he's a good fellow."

When the tops had been removed from the boots, the old lag suggested that they should be made into shoes—one pair for himself and the other for Rodziyevich. Thus the stolen boots were not converted into liquor after all. Grachik said that he was friendly towards all those people and helped them because he had a liking for "educated folk".

"I like a man of education more than I would a beautiful female," he said to me. He was a strange fellow, with dark hair, good features and a pleasant smile; usually pensive and sparing of words, he would at times yield to an outburst of unbridled and almost furious merriness: he would sing, dance, boast of his exploits, and embrace all and sundry as if he were going off to the wars, never to return. He supported some eight beggars who lived in a cellar under a tavern; these were decrepit old men and women, but among them was a young mad-woman with a baby of one year. This is how he became a thief: while he was valet to the governor, he once spent a whole night with his lady-love. In the morning, on his way home in a tipsy state he forcibly took a jar of milk from a woman who was selling milk, and drank up the contents. He offered resistance when he was caught, and was sent to prison by Kolontayev, the Justice of the Peace, who, though he had the reputation of a liberal, performed his duties with severity. On leaving prison, Vaska broke into Kolontayev's study, tore up all the latter's papers, stole his alarm-clock and a pair of

binoculars and again landed in jail. I made his acquaintance while he was making a getaway from some night-watchmen after an unsuccessful attempt at burglary; I tripped up one of his pursuers, thus helping Vaska to escape, and ran away in his company.

There were strange people among these outcasts and there was much in them that I could not understand. What made me prejudiced in their favour was the fact that they had no complaints to make against life; they had no envy of the easy life of the better-off, speaking of it with ridicule and irony, without the least sign of the sour-grapes attitude. They seemed to have a feeling of pride about the matter, as if they realised that, though their lives were poverty-stricken, they were themselves of better stuff than those who had an easy time of it.

Kuvalda, the keeper of a doss-house whom I depicted in *Down-and-outs*, was a man I first saw in court with Kolontayev presiding. I was amazed by the dignity with which this ragged man answered questions put by the judge, and by the contempt he displayed in countering evidence brought forward by a policeman, the attorney and the plaintiff, an inn-keeper Kuvalda had beaten up. No less was I astonished by the good-natured bantering indulged in by the Odessa tramp who told me an incident described by me in *Chelkash*. We met in a hospital in the town of Nikolayev and I have a pleasant recollection of his smile, which displayed his splendid white teeth and put the closure to his account of how he had been deceived by a young fellow he had hired to do some work: "So I let him go with the money; go away, you fool, and do what you like with it."

He reminded me of Dumas's "noble" heroes. We were sitting in the lunettes of the fortress outside the town, after we had left hospital, and, while treating me to some melons, he asked me: "Would you like to join me in some profitable dealing? I think you're a likely lad for the job."

It was a flattering offer, but by that time I already knew that there were things more wholesome than smuggling and thieving.

What I have said is an explanation of my predilection for outcasts and tramps—my urge to depict people out of the ordinary rut, and not drab philistines. I was also under the influence of foreign literature and, in the first place, of French literature, which I found more vivid and colourful than that of Russia. However, the chief reason was my desire to enliven, through my imagination, the “oppressively drab life” my fifteen-year-old correspondent has written of.

As I have already said, this desire is called “Romanticism”. In the opinion of certain critics my romanticism was a reflection of idealism in my philosophy. I think that appraisal wrong.

Philosophical idealism teaches that man, animals and all man-created things are under the sway of “ideas”. These are most perfect models of everything created by man, whose activities depend completely on those models and whose work consists in imitating “ideas”, the existence of which he is alleged to sense in some vague manner. From this point of view, there exist somewhere over and above us the idea of fetters and of the internal combustion engine, the idea of the tubercle bacillus and of the modern magazine rifle, the idea of the toad, the philistine, the rat and, in general, of everything that exists on earth and is created by man. It is perfectly obvious that hence follows the inescapable recognition that there exists the creator of all ideas, the one who, for some reason, created the eagle and the louse, the elephant and the frog.

For me there are no ideas that exist outside of man; for me it is man and only man that is the creator of all things and all ideas; it is he that is a miracle-worker and the future lord of all Nature’s forces. What is most beautiful in this world of ours has been created by man’s labour, by his clever hands; all our thoughts and ideas spring from the process of labour, and this is something the history of art, science and technology convinces us of. Thought follows the fact. I pay homage to Man because I can see in our world nothing but the embodiment of his reason, his imagination and his surmise. God is just as much an invention of man’s mind as photography

is, the difference being that the camera records that which really is, whereas God is in fact a photograph of what man has invented about himself as a being that wishes and is able to be omniscient, omnipotent and absolutely just.

If there is need to speak of the "sacred", then I will say that the only thing I hold sacred is man's dissatisfaction with himself, his striving to become better than he is; I also hold sacred his hatred of all the rubbish that clutters up life and which he himself has brought into being; his desire to put an end to envy, greed, crime, disease, wars and all enmity among people in the world; his labour.

1928

TALKS ON CRAFTSMANSHIP

I

What I want to describe happened thirty years before our times, so there may well be some slight discrepancies in my story.

Even as a child, I observed that Nizhni-Novgorod was not lacking in "simpletons", "half-wits" and "divine fools". "Normal" folk, that is to say, the middle-class, were ambivalent in their attitude to the "abnormals": they made fun of the "half-wits", but were slightly scared of them too, as if suspecting that their madness concealed a special wisdom denied to the reason of the "normals". Their suspicions were justified.

At fourteen years of age, Muza Gushchina was recognised as a simpleton, and within two or three years all the middle-class townsfolk prized her as a "clairvoyant" with powers of foretelling the future. Hundreds of people used to drive or walk to her little house on the Grebeshok, where she would intone some kind of mumbo-jumbo in a tiny sing-song voice, charging twenty-five kopeks for the pri-

vilege. She was small and plump, with a neat roly-poly figure and a pink-and-white china doll complexion. She went about in public simply dressed in a long coarse linen robe down to her heels, a black riband tied firmly round her neck, her bright "rye-straw" hair tumbling down her back. She always held her head inclined down towards her left shoulder, as if listening to the voice of her own heart.

Her blue-grey eyes, half-veiled by eyelashes, were set under thick, dark brows in the round, rosy face. They seemed incongruous on that angelically foolish countenance, and there was something disturbing and sinister about them to my mind.

Out of curiosity, I too went to Muza with my quarter-ruble piece. She wagged her finger playfully at me and said:

"What's dreamed by you shall not come true."

But to my comrade, a carter, an extremely shy lad with a hare lip:

"Billy goat, don't go in yard; billy goat, climb mountain hard."

When she was twenty-one, she amazed the whole town by taking court proceedings against her uncle and guardian for stealing and dissipating the inheritance due to her from her mother. It transpired that Muza had been saving up her twenty-five-kopek clairvoyance fees and, assisted by a certain "independent consultant on legal matters", had been secretly and craftily amassing the evidence against her uncle. This evidence proved so damning that he was committed to prison.

For several years, Muza had been fooling the public by selling them hocus-pocus at twenty-five kopeks a time; but she had been feigning feeble-mindedness in self-defence, she had emerged victorious in the battle for "property", and the normal people forgave her this deception and showered her with honour and glory.

There was another and similar case—the circuit court trial of the escaped convict Kozhin, the merchant Malinina, and fourteen others.

This gang was charged with forging and uttering hundred-ruble banknotes, and also coupons to the

value of 2 rubles 16 kopeks and 4 rubles 32 kopeks respectively.

In the prisoners' dock sat a comely woman, young for her years, with a moderately ruddy complexion and soft, languorous eyes, looking calmly at the public from under bushy eyebrows, answering the magistrates' questions briefly, somewhat touchily, and with a clear consciousness of her own worth. She would say something in a fruity voice and dab her bright lips with a handkerchief, as if wiping off a stray fleck of spittle. Beside her sat Kozhin, solid, bearded, about fifty, heavily-built and handsome, with merry eyes and the clear voice of an innocent man. He was loquacious and loved a practical joke. On the back of several hundred-ruble notes, where you used to find the usual warning excerpts from the articles of the Statute Book, he, Kozhin, had printed: "Any man who doesn't forge government banknotes is a fool." With this inappropriate prank he had wrecked an enterprise which had been technically and organisationally foolproof. The rest of the accused were nondescript characters, the pushers. Two of them had turned evidence, and one was "feeble-minded". During the case for the prosecution and the questioning by counsel, it became clear that his part in the affair had been insignificant and that he may even have become involved in it by accident. The informers did not give the prosecution any material evidence against the lad, and restricted themselves to affirming that he was "also mixed up in this business", that he was "a half-wit", by way of being a "divine fool", and a "trouble-maker".

The "trouble-maker" behaved excitably, talked loudly to his neighbours on the bench, and kept asking, "What's going to happen now?" He answered the magistrates incoherently, in a kind of hoarse yell. Whenever they shut him up, he yawned, dozed off, started, and again asked, "Now what?" His skull was irregular in shape, as if cramped at the temples; the pike-fish mouth was a deep gash across the narrow, senile-looking face; the eyes were small, sharp and brutish under the ginger brows. The defence counsel, convinced that he would be acquitted, did not ask for a medical report.

There was one baffling aspect to the case. Neither the investigating officer nor the court were able to establish which of the accused had been the principal "distributor of the said goods". According to the "pushers" and "innocent victims", they had been getting the counterfeit money from "various persons", and this was borne out by the informers, who did not point out any such person among the accused.

Suddenly, after a whispered exchange with Malinina, Kozhin said loudly to the "half-wit":

"Now then, stop fooling about and talk! D'you think you're going to get off scot-free?"

The "feeble-minded" one stood up and, quite rationally, coherently, and not without pride, informed the court that the "distributor" had been none other than himself. He gave the "pushers" irrefutable proof that there had been no "various persons" and that they had been dealing with him, and him alone, in Odessa, Warsaw, and at the Irbit and Makarev fairs. He had been presenting himself to them in the guise of a merchant, a monk, or even a Jew. Just to prove that he could transform himself into a Jew with ease, he spoke two or three sentences in the accent of a Jewish story-teller. As he spoke, he kept glancing at the public, at the jury, and at the bench, and it was clear from the grin on his face that he was gloating—over the idiots. The jury recommended three particularly severe sentences for Kozhin, Malinina, and him. When the court pronounced sentence on the erstwhile "feeble-minded" one, the public growled their approval and some even applauded.

Needless to say, the Muza business and this case both confirmed the suspicion of the "normal" people that seeming simplemindedness can be an artificial mask concealing the worldly wisdom by virtue of which they, the normals, live themselves. Both these cases awakened my interest in abnormal people.

I have already mentioned Igosha Death-in-the-Pocket somewhere else, but I must return to him here. He was of indeterminate age, tall and skinny, his face and neck seamed with flabby dirt or grime-engrained wrinkles, and his hands black. He was forever feeling with his crooked

fingers at fences, gates, doors, kerbstones, and his own body: ribs, belly, chest, neck, face. I always had the impression that his hands only travelled upwards: the quick downward drop was almost invisible to the naked eye. The grimy face, framed in the ragged black beard, was likewise in perpetual motion, the eyebrows twitching, the nostrils flaring, the lips always mouthing the same monotonous obscenities, the sharp Adam's apple bobbing up and down, and only the little black eyes fixed, like those of a blind man. Winter and summer alike, he wore felt boots, an unbuttoned sheepskin coat, dark blue trousers of coarse homespun and a shirt of the same material, the collar always open or torn, the collar-bones exposed, and the skin pulsing weirdly in the hollows between the bones and the neck. His gait was loose-jointed, as if he might come apart at any moment and the shaggy head go bowling over the roadway.

There was something rather horrible about the immobility of his eyes, and especially about his hands and their persistent fumbling, as if he wanted to convince himself that things were real and not just imaginary. I was much intrigued by the way Igosha kept touching the physical world.

Normal people were afraid of him and sullenly kept out of his way, but the little urchins used to run after him shouting "Death-in-the-Pocket! Igosha Death-in-the-Pocket!"

He would dive deep into the pockets of his sheepskin coat where he kept a supply of stones and throw them at the children with equal dexterity with his left and right hands. As he did so, he would swear monotonously, and when he ran out of stones he would snap his teeth and howl like a wolf.

Another half-wit was Grinya Lobastov, only to be seen in spring and summer on a clear day. He used to sit on the bench at the front gates of his house in Studenaya Street, with a short, neatly whittled stick in each hand. Indefatigably, with the speed and dexterity of a conjurer, he would juggle with the sticks as if trying to get each of his hands to grow a sixth finger. Small, podgy, always clean, in white clothes, his gentle, womanish face

framed in a soft, light mousy beard, he used to stare with narrow, colourless eyes into the blue vacancy of the sky, smiling a strange smile, the guilty smile of a man who had fathomed a secret and was very embarrassed. He was deaf. "Normal" people thought of him as "blessed" and many, as they passed him in the street, bowed low to this clean little idiot.

Then there was Reutov, a little man with a black, wedge-shaped beard. He never wore a hat, winter or summer alike. His high, narrow skull was topped with a few sparse, extremely coarse hairs. The long face framed the hooked nose of a comic.

Reutov used to go about with his head bowed as if he was worrying about something, swinging his arms, and wherever he had to give way to oncoming pedestrians, invariably shrinking back against the nearest fence or wall. If a passer-by happened to touch him, Reutov would spend a considerable time carefully brushing something from his clothes with the palm of his hand—something evidently visible to him alone. The son of a wealthy draper, he was an avid theatre-goer and could be seen in the gallery every night during the season.

The normal people ignored him: he wasn't ugly enough, or frightening, or interestingly mad.

There were several other fools in the town, and by some freak of circumstances they were all the children of well-to-do or rich people. I took note of this.

Misha Tiulenev impressed me most of all. Of medium height, broad-shouldered, with huge mane of dirty hair flung back over his neck and behind his protruding ears, he looked like an unfrocked priest. He had prominent cheek-bones, and the clean-shaven, tight stretched skin was the colour of clay. The round, owlsh, protruding green-grey eyes shone dully under the thick eyebrows. His nose was fat and fleshy, the nostrils distended. The lips were fleshy too, prominent, cracked and bloody, as if bitten; and there was blood on the shaven chin as well. Misha's heavy greatcoat had been washed by the rains, bleached and dried in the sun, so that the grey threads in the seams showed up like fish-bones.

All the buttons of his coat were missing, the pockets

were torn, and the lining frayed, with tufts of the interior padding sticking out. Underneath, he wore a russet jacket and a waistcoat, both devoid of buttons, like his trousers. He always walked down the road, keeping close to the pavement, and he went along as if trudging through deep snow or sand, laboriously lifting his feet and slapping down the broad soles of his tattered shoes. He kept his left hand tucked in his waistcoat and the right one swinging at his side, a small cobblestone clutched tight in the fingers.

If he saw any womenfolk coming his way, he threatened them with the stone, growling and muttering with a strange smacking of the lips. He was horribly repulsive to look at, normal people couldn't stand him, and if he showed up on the main streets of the town in the daytime, the police chased him off like a dog, aided by carters who lashed at Misha with their whips. Tiulenev would duck his head under his greatcoat and run away awkwardly, kicking his legs up in the air like a foal.

I often came across him in the meadows out of town, or hiding under the walls in the shadow of the kremlin towers. He aroused feelings of dislike in me too, even loathing. I thought he was putting on an act and deliberately lifting his feet in the air like that, as if crossing a swamp.

I was also repelled by the dull look of the glassy green eyes. One night, by the light of the full moon, I came across him in the churchyard of St. Nicholas-on-the-Pokrovka. As I went into the churchyard, I heard a heavy thumping noise in the corner between a small outbuilding and the wall of the church. I could see the figure of a man there. I thought he was knocking the wall down. But it was Tiulenev beating his breast. Before I reached him, he slithered down the wall, sat on the ground, and started muttering to himself. I could see the fat lips quivering and spitting out those champing sounds of his:

"Chakh, chaff, choff. . ."

I squatted down in front of him and listened. I had the impression that Tiulenev was trying to say something, but couldn't. He sat there with his eyes closed, still beating his breast, but feebly now. I reached out and

touched his shoulder, whereupon he pushed me off with one hand and started groping over the ground with the other, probably in search of a stone. He was now clumping and spluttering much more loudly and coherently:

"Chimp—champ—chump—chomp—chimp..."

He then stood up, emerged from the shadows into the moonlight, stooped down, picked up a stone, and went away, clumping his feet more loudly than usual. I sat on the church steps and lit a cigarette. The light of my match brought the night watchman from somewhere.

"Thanks for getting rid of Misha," he said. "He scares me. If he bashes you you're down for."

The old man informed me that Tiulenev often came to that corner. He would stand facing the wall, beating his breast and muttering to himself.

"They say he wasn't born mental."

Everybody said that Tiulenev and the other "abnormals" were not born mad, but I was never able to ascertain the causes of the "mental" disease, though I persistently questioned many of the older inhabitants.

I found the fools more interesting than the "normal" people. This was perfectly natural, for I noticed that normal folk reduce their whole lives to the elementary processes of eating, reproduction, and sleep. I also noticed that the even flow of these processes was ensured by the exploitation of other people's strength—by "business" deals, fraud, and petty swindling. All in all, the lives of "normal" people were chock-a-block with every conceivable kind of trashy peccadillo. They were more or less dimly aware of their own sinfulness, for the "normal" people went to church on Saturdays and Sundays in order to complain to god about their hard and sinful lives and ask his forgiveness, fasted, confessed to the priests, and symbolically partook of Christ's body and blood, while incessantly overtaxing the bodies and drinking the blood of people who were working for the affirmation and enrichment of the normal life. Each and every one of these normal people had a small and inviolable store of biases, prejudices, and superstitions, and all this material of self-defence was fused together by a soulless belief in god and the devil and by an obtuse distrust of human reason.

There were ninety thousand "normals" in the town, but the theatres were empty, though the actors performing there were not bad.

I found it amusing that Reutov never missed a performance. It seemed to me that the blessed Lobastov could gaze up into the heavens with a clearer conscience than the people who knew well that mushrooms are more useful than stars. The "normals" fortified their houses or built new ones every bit as oppressive and stifling as the old ones; but Igosha wandered loose-limbed about the streets and touched everything as if doubting the permanence of stone, wood and earth.

The romanticism peculiar to youth allowed me to invest the abnormals with knowledge and feelings inaccessible to, and inexperienced by, others.

Wits who belong to the clan of the "normals" might say that I learned from fools.

And it's true. I did learn from them, but considerably later and not from the fools I have mentioned here. There is nothing on this earth which we cannot find instructive, the world is truly ours because we put all our strength into it, organising it according to our aims. The whole world is material for us to study.

And so I've described one order in my adolescent impressions: idiots, divine fools, and abnormal people in general. But alongside this order, there gradually formed another which was quite different.

Nizhni-Novgorod was a city of merchants. "Its houses are of stone and its men of iron," said one of the proverbs about this city.

The "normal" mode of life of these "men of iron" was well known to the people I "circulated" amongst, in the way a spinning top is whipped into "circulation". I was egged on by a driving and relentless urge to understand things that were then beyond my ken and aroused a feeling of indignation in me. The coachmen, nurses, janitors, housemaids and other menials who served the "men of iron" spoke of them in two ways: when they described the christening and name's day parties, the weddings and the funeral banquets arranged by their masters, it was with the same awe with which they would speak of high

celebrations conducted by the bishop at the cathedral; but when it came to the day-by-day life of the "men of iron", these underlings spoke with fear and resentment, with perplexity and despondency, and sometimes with repressed malice.

In their mental make-up these servants were very much like "normal" folk, but, being "a youth versed in the writings", I was able to make out certain under-currents in their stories.

I could realise the nightmare that made up their masters' lives, which centred on the drama of the struggle between the flesh and the spirit. The flesh was fed on heavy food—*shchi* (cabbage soup.—*Tr.*), geese and pies of every description, all this washed down with oceans of tea, *kvass* and vodka, and worn down by ample exercise connected with the business of "continuing the family line," subdued by fasting, and fettered by the calls of trading activities. All this would keep the flesh in submission to the "spirit" for the space of some ten or twenty years.

Well-guzzled on rich food, callous and ruthless towards others, the "iron" man lived in pious humility, eschewing theatres and concerts, and finding entertainment in church-going and listening to choirs and stentorian deacons, while at home he would find diversion in the steaming bath-house, cards, toping, and in addition in growing a magnificent beard.

To rephrase the proverb, there's no sinner like a hoary sinner when the "spirit" yields to the blandishments of the flesh. There came an evil day when this upright life would fall apart like a house of soiled and greasy cards: for instance, it would become known that some "man of iron" had committed the penal crime of seducing minors, though he was married to a woman still comely, and his daughters were nearing the marrying age. To protect the honour of these daughters, the good-natured and well-intentioned wife would say to the sinner:

"What are we to do? We have marriageable daughters, but who will marry them if their father has been sentenced to hard labour? Won't you take a powder?"

The sinner would take a powder several days before

the indictment had been drawn up, and the affair would blow over "in view of the decease of the accused".

Then, take the instance of another "man of iron", whose lust and baneful nature had driven three wives into the grave. Since the church forbade a fourth marriage and he thought it unwise to install a mistress in his household, he found a wife for his son, and, after making the latter drunk at the wedding feast and locking him in the cellar, he took his place on the wedding night.

When the son tried to protest to his father, he was brutally beaten by the latter, and ran away from home, never to return. The father slowly murdered his fourth victim, then arranged the marriage of his second son, who proved more amenable and yielded his conjugal rights without a struggle. He soon took to drink, becoming a wretched drunkard.

I made the father's acquaintance when he was eighty-two years old, but a hale man, with a back as straight as a ramrod and in possession of all his teeth. There were still devils in his glittering dark eyes, his memory was excellent and he had a detailed knowledge of all human sins, as well as all the punishments awaiting them in hell.

"Whatever you may say, brother, you and I will be strung up down there and boiled in pitch for about six hundred years," he would promise, winking a dare-devil eye, and would then ask with a brazen smirk: "But how can that be? It is not the body but the soul that must suffer torment, and the soul has neither skin nor bone, eh?" At this wily question he would cackle loud and long.

I did not take at their face value all the stories I had heard about his whilom exploits, so that when I brought him into my book *Foma Gordeyev* under the name of Anany Shchurov I somewhat docked the number of his malefactions.

Against the drab background of the kind of petty-philistine life that was considered "normal" these "men of iron" seemed colourful to me, and indeed so they were. Of particular significance to me was the story of Gordei Chernov.

He was reputed to possess a peculiar knowledge of all the wiles and tricks of the Volga. Standing on the

captain's bridge, he would conduct his tugs in person, with caravans of barges in their wake, finding free channels amidst the shifting Volga sandbanks, to the confusion of the official hydraulic engineers and the shamed envy of other captains who, unable to find a fairway, would have to shift the cargoes of their deep-laden barges to vessels of shallower draught. Chernov was always lucky in all his undertakings, the obstacles he did come up against being of his own making. He once built a barge of unprecedented cargo capacity, evoking the opinion that it could never be used even when the water was at flood level.

"It will when we tow it," he claimed, but he was wrong: it was never used.

He had built to his own designs a mansion of crude and flamboyant style, with turrets, domes and onion-shaped cupolas; he had the whole affair painted in the most gaudy colours, but then refused to live in it, leaving around it the fence that had been put up while it was building. The story was told that he was once approached for a job by a young man who had been expelled from an Orthodox seminary. Chernov sent the lad to the River Sura as a grain stevedore at 15 rubles a month. One day a telegram this young man had sent reached Chernov. It read: "Send tug, water-level falling."

Chernov's telegraph reply was: "Bosh, you lying fool." Two days later the seminarist wired: "Barges high and dry," to which Chernov replied "Coming". "So you're as pleased as Punch that you've been wiser than your boss?" he asked the seminarist on arriving at Vasilsursk. "Roll up your sleeves and let's see who's the better man!" There followed a good honest fight on the Volga bank, witnessed by all and sundry, and the seminarist gave his employer a thrashing.

"You're the man for me," said Chernov. "You've got the brains and the guts too. I'm putting you in charge of my business at Pokrovskaya Sloboda, with a salary of 50 rubles. More to come if you make good."

The story ran that the two became close friends.

I heard of this fight from law-abiding citizens of Vasilsursk, who spoke of it with approval.

Any other man would have been dubbed a crank had he embarked on similar building experiments and madcap pranks, but Chernov won the nickname of "the American".

There came a day when this man, so successful in his ventures, strong, handsome and a reveller, vanished, abandoning his business affairs, without a word to his son and his daughter. The search that followed was unsuccessful, so that it was thought that he had been murdered. His estate came under the Public Trustee and was sold for a ridiculously low price; creditors and employees were paid in full, the remainder providing Chernov's children with several tens of thousands of rubles.

Gordei Chernov made an appearance in 1896 during the All-Russian Exhibition in Nizhni-Novgorod. He had turned monk, and had arrived from the Old Athos Monastery "to see the celebrations in his home town", and see it he did. After a rousing round of drinking bouts with old friends, he left for his monastery, where he died in 1900.

My fancy was caught by this semi-legend about a man who had turned his back on the "normal" life and rejected it with such simplicity. I was also much taken by the pride with which the story of Chernov was told to me by A. A. Zarubin, grey-haired and well advanced in years, a former vodka manufacturer, who had unsuccessfully faked an insolvency, a man who had seen the inside of prison but had become a convinced adherent of Lev Tolstoi and organiser of a blue-ribbon society; on one occasion, when he was among a crowd of admirers of John of Kronstadt, a priest who had quite a following in those days, this man publicly called the priest "an actor in the emperor's church". I have already told the story of how this man took the police to court for recovery of the sum of one kopek. He carried the case to the Senate, and when the governor of Nizhni-Novgorod Gubernia forbade publication of the Senate's decision in Zarubin's favour, the old man addressed the governor in the following terms: "Have you been placed over us so as to break the laws?" The Senatorial ukase was published in a local paper.

In those days such things were considered outstanding acts of public duty.

Zarubin was not the only man who spoke of Chernov in tones of pride; many who spoke of that man in the same fashion seemed to be bragging: "That's the kind of people we are, understand?"

And understand I did. Clever folk, like lawyers, newspapermen and intellectuals in general, appraised the "iron men's" eccentricities with the Ostrovsky yardstick, asserting that they were simply "working off steam". I did not care much about the reasons that made people "work off steam" so long as they kept the pot boiling.

Such facts were of course a rarity, but they nevertheless suggested that there was a need for change in the life about me. I had a feeling that even among the "men of iron" there were such who did not wish to conform to the accepted pattern, finding it unlawful and even "hostile", to quote old man Orlov, an adherent of Nechayev* and translator of Flaubert's *La tentation de Saint-Antoine* and Leopardi's *Conversazione*. Actual life is as inconsistent and voluble as a market-woman. One of my friends, the house-painter Yezdokov, would sing in a shrill voice while at work in his cradle at a third-storey height:

I don't need anything in the world,
Anything in the world but you.

The owner of the house, Alexei Maximovich Gubin, churchwarden, former mayor and an old roisterer, who had just beaten up the church deacon during mass, would yell to Gubin: "D'you mean to say you care only for one? Only one skirt? One won't keep you going! But when it comes to the truth, all people want only one kind; we need such a kind of truth that would make all of us sons of bitches crawl away from it in fear and trembling. That's what we need. . . ."

Then there was Maria Kapitonovna Kashina, proprietress of a big Volga shipping line and a clever woman, who would start philosophising at tea:

* *Nechayev, S. G.* (1847-1882)—a revolutionary plotter, who used terror and other adventurist methods of struggle.—*Ed.*

"We have made a pile of money, and there's too much of it; we have built, but there's no elbow-room, and life is as dull as ditch-water. What we need is to begin all over again, from the savage state, eh? That would be fine. Perhaps things would work out differently."

I heard quite a number of such expressions of a negative attitude towards life. However, though "iron" mothers and fathers said such things, most of them lived lives of an unyielding "normal" respectability. I had a fair knowledge of the way in which almost all the leading merchant families of the city lived, and knew that Chernov was not alone in turning his back on that kind of "normal" respectability; many others did the same, breaking with a mode of living that had been built up over many decades.

My work at a lawyer's office and my frequent visits to the circuit court made me familiar with dozens of everyday dramas. I knew of many building contractors, illiterate and grasping men who each employed tens and hundreds of workers just as rude and uncouth as their masters. I knew that all this was the way things were, and had always been, the "normal" life, as I was told by carpenters, stone-masons and navvies.

It was obvious that "making a pile" was no more difficult than making bricks out of clay, and called for no particular effort or talent. The only difference between contractor and workman was that the former ate more and better food and was buried with more show, while the workman was just put away in his six feet of earth. This callous haste in the burial of poor folk was offensive to me and caused me pain. When I was a youth I wanted all people to be buried in state, to the sound of music and church bells. Life was so arduous that surely as much pomp and circumstance as possible should be brought into it. This romantic desire must have arisen in me from a reading of books in Church-Slavonic, a language which treats all subjects, even—in the Bible—such that are unsavoury, in a sonorous and grandiloquent fashion.

There was neither rhyme nor reason in life, with its cold and clammy senselessness; this was a state of affairs that all had got used to, so that nobody noticed how

empty, dismal and shallow it was. For my part I saw it all too clearly, but that gave me no comfort. Books depicted a different life, which was perhaps even more dolorous, but I felt it was less poverty-stricken, of greater interest, full of a meaning that was beyond my ken. The people I met in books were more vivid, cleverer and of greater stature than the "normal" folk I knew.

My reading was copious, enthralling, and exhilarating, but the books I read did not lead me away from life but only whetted my interest in it, sharpened my faculties of observation and comparison, and also my eagerness to learn more of life.

By the time I was twenty or twenty-two I saw people in the following light: the vast majority were philistines, that accursed breed of "normal" men and women; from this midst there arose "men of iron", such that became aldermen and churchwardens, drove in their own carriages and followed in the immediate wake of the clergy during church processions. At rare moments some of these "men of iron" would kick over the traces.

Compared to men such as these, the Onegin, Pechorin, Beltovs, Ryabinin, Dostoyevsky's "idiots" and all heroes that had stepped out of the pages of books seemed to me pygmies strutting about on the stilts of fine words, people whom I considered "blood relatives of Oblomov", to quote an appellation coined by Osipovich-Novodvorsky in his *Episode from the Life of One Neither Peacock Nor Sparrow*.

I considered even more flabby and drab the petty figures of Svetlov, Stozharov, Volodin and other "revolutionaries", whom writers like Omulevsky, Mordovtsev, and Zasodimsky hastily concocted for the "edification of young people". There was much that was beyond my understanding, but I had a feeling that people of that type were unable to make a clean sweep of the "normal" kind of life, and at best were capable only of "shifting the furniture about", as the drunken chorister in the play *The Petty Bourgeois* put it.

In the late eighties and early nineties the children of the "iron men" began displaying a marked tendency "to get out of life as quickly as possible", to quote a note

left before his suicide by a Kazan student called Medvedev. A girl student, Latyshova by name, daughter of a wealthy tea merchant, and a merry-hearted and gifted girl, shot herself after her wedding. In 1888, a total of, I believe, eleven students committed suicide, among them two girls. Later, a Gymnasium pupil whose father was a wealthy Nizhni-Novgorod mill-owner shot himself; there were several other suicides.

I took note of all these facts. I have pointed out elsewhere that in most cases "innocents" and "simpletons" came of well-to-do families. In my earlier years I had no opportunities of getting a first-hand knowledge of merchant-class children, but in the middle of the nineties I was able to observe them at close quarters as Gymnasium pupils and University students. I. Rukavishnikov, the recently deceased poet and author of the novel *An Accursed Family*, once brought me the manuscript of his first story, *Seeds Pecked by Birds*. The story displayed poor craftsmanship, but I remember that in it a youth complained of his father having ruined his life. Even then Rukavishnikov was given to drink and tried to convince me that, just like Baudelaire, he could see life in its proper light only when he was mellow. His novel *An Accursed Family* depicted, with little skill, his dreadful grandmother Lyubov, his father Sergei, and his uncles Ivan and Mitrofan.

The title of the novel is most fitting. . . .

Indeed, I met quite a number of young people of the merchant class, and I envied them their knowledge of foreign languages and their ability to read European literature in the original. There was nothing else in them to envy. They spoke in polished language, but in a way that was obscure; the words were unimpeachable, but below the surface there seemed to be nothing but cotton wool or sawdust. As was the case with Rukavishnikov, these people could see life in its proper light only when they were in their cups, though they did not drink in excess and grew drunk more on fearful words than on liquor. They spoke of the "horrors" in the works of Poe, Baudelaire and Dostoyevsky, but they thought they were speaking of the horrible things within themselves. I could

see that there was nothing horrifying about them; some of the ruffians I knew were far more awe-inspiring. These young men admired the principal character of *Notes from Underground*, but it was obvious that at bottom what they liked in him was his hope that there would come along some one capable of sending some future prosperity to Jericho.

Gordei Chernov was much more to my liking. They were allured to Schopenhauer, and this attraction made itself particularly felt in the unwholesome things they said about women and love, talk that laid bare their libido, inflamed by much thought and through books.

I had read Schopenhauer earlier than they did and with no harm to myself. These people propagandised Balmont and Bryusov.* Of course I realised that both of these were enriching poetry from the angle of form and technique, but I could make neither head nor tail of these poets' attitude towards the realities of life and towards "normal" people. My impression was that they were floating about somewhere above life in a cloud of words, of which stuff "evil reality" was, in their opinion, made up; this reality was, in the final analysis, also made up of words, was pleasure-giving, for it provided their word-creating urge with material to feed on.

I. Rukavishnikov once read some verses of his at a students' soir  e, and the following ominous lines from his verses are engraved in my memory:

Daring seem our words and verses,
Yet condemned to death are we,
We, the premature precursors
Of a spring-time yet to be.

These dismal words at first evoked my surprise, for they did not seem to blend with the lilt of the poem, and I associated them with polka rhythm. All that was quite natural. I used to attend servants' evening parties, where the guests danced to the sound of songs in lieu of music. They usually sang something like this:

* Balmont, K. D. and Bryusov, U. Y.—Russian symbolist poets.—*Ed.*

Home they hurried, lass and laddie,
Calling father as they ran:
"Daddy, daddy, oh dear daddy,
Come and see the drowned man!"

It was most comical to see the girls friskily footing it
to polka time, singing the refrain:

And a swarm of inky crayfish
Seized upon the bloated corpse!

The offspring of those who were building a "normal life" for themselves did not strike me as "normal" people. This of course stood to their credit, but hardly brought them happiness. They styled themselves "decadents". I have no recollection of ever asking myself what kind of spring they might be precursors of.

I think I have said quite enough to give the reader some idea of the material that went into the making of my *Foma Gordeyev*, how that material was culled, and how poorly it was worked up. Critics have praised the book, but if I were a critic I would have reproached the author for having reduced a wealth of material to a story of how a young man was driven out of his mind.

At this point I ought to say that everything I have described may not have taken place in the way I have put it. How can that be?

Pierre Simon de Laplace, the celebrated mathematician, called "the Newton of France", and author of *Exposition du système du monde*, once said:

Striving in his impatience to discover the cause of certain phenomena, a scientist gifted with a vivid imagination will often find the cause before his observations give him reason to discern it. Prejudiced in favour of the correctness of the explanation he has created, he does not discard it when the facts contradict him, but modifies the facts so as to make them fit his theory; he distorts the work of Nature in order to force it to resemble the work of his imagination, without thinking of the fact that time will establish only the results of observation and calculation.

The work of a man of letters resembles that of a scientist; in just the same way he "will often find the cause before his observations give him reason to discern it".

A prominent part in *Foma Gordeyev* is played by Yakov Mayakin, a rope manufacturer. Another of the "men of iron" and, besides, a "brainy" man, he is capable of thinking in a bigger way than is demanded by his purely private interests. Politically shrewd, he realises the political importance of his class.

I never met any man in real life with the mental make-up I have described in Mayakin. I know of only one attempt in literature to depict a merchant capable of thinking politically: this was *Vasily Tyorkin*, a novel by P. Boborykin, a writer highly sensitive to new ideas. Though endowed with a keen eye, he worked in a naturalistic vein, arriving at conclusions that were always hasty, but since he spent most of his time abroad, he was very properly criticised for possessing too little factual evidence for the conclusions he presented to the reader, and also for falling into "photographism" and a dispassionate registration of the facts. *Vasily Tyorkin* met with higher recognition than other novels by the same author, but I think that was because in the figure of the merchant Tyorkin, this "Socrates of the warehouse", the critics espied the well-familiar liberal-intellectual and were much gladdened by the discovery. "Our ranks have grown"; a semi-civilised Moscow merchant, who might have walked out of one of Ostrovsky's plays, has blossomed forth almost into a full-blown European bourgeois. In my own opinion, this merchant's thinking followed the pattern of a certain section of the intellectuals in the late eighties, the section that was routed and crushed after the autocracy had defeated the *Narodnaya Volya* terrorists. This frame of mind can be called "anarchism of the defeated". The philosophic framework of this anarchism was borrowed partly from Dostoyevsky's *Notes from Underground*, but in the main from the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche, as presented in articles published in the journal *Problems of Philosophy and Psychology* in 1892.

What kind of material was the figure of Yakov Mayakin built of? In the first place, I had a sufficient knowledge

of "masters", and had first-hand experience of their deep-rooted urge to live on the labour of others and also of their firm conviction that they had every right to do so. At an early age I felt that my own employer considered me his inferior, a subhuman placed completely in his power. At the same time, however, I often saw that I was more literate than the man I was working for, and at times I had a feeling that I had more intelligence too. At the same time, I could not help noticing that, by spurning me aside, my master was creating in me an urge to work. I realised labour's decisive cultural and historical value at a fairly early age—as soon as I had felt a zest for work, felt that sawing wood, digging earth and baking bread were things that could be done with the same enjoyment as singing songs. This in no way speaks of any peculiar features in my make-up; anybody can become "peculiar" in this sense if he makes up his mind to devote sufficient effort to the purpose. The whole thing was quite simple: I was a healthy lad with a goodly store of energy which cried out for free play, room for expression, to make itself felt. That is the kind of thing energy is and its chief feature. Besides that, books helped me to understand the organising power of labour. Chief among these were four books: V. V. Bervi-Flerovsky's* *ABC of the Social Sciences*, Draper's *History of the Intellectual Development of Europe*, Whewell's *History of the Inductive Sciences*, and Johannes Scherr's *Deutsche Kultur- und Sittengeschichte*. These books contained a wealth of factual material and, together with my personal experience, made me feel confident that the significance of labour as the foundation of humanity's cultural growth should be evident and comprehensible to any working man, if he is not an idiot.

It might be appropriate at this point to reply to certain complaints voiced by new-fledged writers, and in particular to a plaintive letter from one of them. Referring to what is taking up so much of his time—"my wife,

* *Bervi-Flerovsky, V. V.* (1829-1918)—Russian *Narodnik* publicist. His *Conditions of the Working Class in Russia* (1869) was highly praised by Karl Marx.—*Ed.*

my son, and the baby we are expecting” and, more important, “my load of public duties”—he asserts that “creative efforts can yield maximum results only if a man feels that he is a writer, and nothing else, just like you”, meaning myself. In the first place, I would like to advise those embarking on prose and poetic writing to delete from their vocabulary the aristocratic expression “creative efforts” and substitute for it a simpler and more accurate word—work.

When a young man has written a slender booklet of mediocre verse or inferior stories and terms his “output” “creative efforts”, this sounds childish and ridiculous in a country in which the working class is not only building huge factories, but is completely refashioning the face of the land, bringing about in the countryside something in the nature of a geological upheaval, and, in general, is tirelessly carrying out colossal work of world-wide significance, in conditions that tax all its strength. It should be realised and remembered that all this is being built almost “out of nothing”, much in the way it is claimed that a certain being created the earth “out of nothing”, and then set the stars in the boundless firmament about it, which is called the Universe. Even if we supposed for a moment that the dull nursery tale about God was true, it would have to be admitted that the earth is a piece of poor workmanship: it contains too much that is harmful to man—parasites both vegetable and animal, much barren soil, and besides, to tell the truth, man himself has not been over well designed. All these imperfect “creative efforts” have to be straightened out, and indeed the job of refashioning the world and creating a socialist life therein is forging ahead and giving promise of superb results. It would be well for young people like those I have just mentioned to stop calling themselves “creators” in a country which needs millions of modest and dedicated working people. There is no sense in pushing oneself, even nominally, into the forefront of the builders of the future: this may have a bad influence on the youth, for some of the latter may imagine themselves superior to ordinary folk, and get swelled heads, as has been the case in the past.

Speaking for myself, I must state that at no time have I felt "a writer and nothing else". In one way or another I have engaged in public activities all my life, and to this day I have not lost my zest for such things. Young writers frequently complain that "petty public duties take up too much time and hamper creative thought" and things like that. I consider such complaints groundless.

Public duties, even the least, cannot be fruitless. If you sweep a courtyard you will prevent harmful dust getting into children's lungs; if you bind a book in good time you will extend its term of service, helping to make it of greater benefit to people, and saving paper for the state. Rough treatment of books causes tremendous loss to the state, because so many books are being printed, and after all, *we* are the State.

The retort will be made that, with the exception of L. Tolstoi, writers from among the nobility, who had no public duties, achieved a high level of excellence in their writings. But then, all of them received a more or less extensive schooling, which disciplines the mind, and develops the perception and cognition of life; such nobles travelled abroad, in Europe, and such journeys expanded their powers of observation, providing them with a wealth of material, comparisons and the like, and thereby enriching them intellectually. The nobles had a wider knowledge of life than *raznochinets* intellectuals, for the latter's field of vision was comparatively limited. This had a particularly adverse effect on such gifted men as Pomyalovsky and Sleptsov.

At this juncture I must repeat what I have said elsewhere: the literature of the nobles was, in my opinion, local in outlook, for it drew its material, in the main, from the central areas of Russia; its principal character was usually a muzhik from Tula or Orel gubernias, but there existed other muzhiks as well, muzhiks from the Novgorod area, from the Volga, Siberia, the Urals, the Ukraine, and so on. The muzhiks of Turgenev and Bunin bear no resemblance to their Vyatka or Yaroslavl counterparts. The literature of the nobility and the *raznochinets* intelligentsia had no eyes for entire regions of the

country, ignored Cossacks from the Don, the Urals and the Kuban, and had nothing to say of the national minorities. This is not meant as disparagement of people who lived in the central areas of the country, or in St. Petersburg or Moscow; my aim is simply to draw attention to an important fact that has escaped attention: our current literature deals with all parts of the Soviet Union, and this stands to its credit. It should not be thought that I would reduce the writing of fiction to the level of local or regional studies, which, incidentally, are of great importance; no, I consider *belles-lettres* a wonderful way of studying people—a fount of human studies.

I have digressed from my main subject—an example I do not recommend imitating—so I shall return to the “masters” I have been talking about.

I studied these people and their “normal” way of life with the closest attention, and listened carefully to what they had to say about life. I was eager to make out what entitled them to look upon those who worked for them, and upon myself in particular, as people more uncouth and stupid than they were. What was this right grounded in, besides force? It was obvious that their philistine “respectability” was in essence nothing but crass obtuseness, the narrow-mindedness of well-fed animals; this was something reflected not only in their attitude towards their employees, but also towards their wives and children, and towards books, in their entire way of life, their amazing unletteredness and the hostile scepticism of ignorance with regard to reason and its operation. By that time, between 15 and 20, I had already learnt something of the relation between religion and science, from Draper’s book *History of the Conflict Between Religion and Science*. This book and certain others helped me to realise the harm caused by canonic, or—what amounts to the same thing—normative thinking based on facts and dogmas supposed to be indisputable and “given for all time”.

The fact that philistine conservatism has retarded the development of industrial techniques is well known, but I would like to remind the reader that the principle of the steam engine was discovered 120 years B.C. and found

no practical application for close on two thousand years; a snake-shaped phonograph was invented in the second century B.C. by Alexander of Abonteus, who used it "to foretell the future". Facts such as these run into hundreds and reveal the shameful indifference shown by the philistines towards the work done by inquiring minds. I will quote a final example: this year Marconi transmitted an electric current by wireless from Genoa to Australia, where he thereby lit electric lamps at a Sydney exhibition. The same sort of thing was done in our country twenty-seven years ago by M. M. Filippov, man of letters and scientist, who had been working for a number of years on the aerial transmission of electric current, and finally succeeded in lighting, from St. Petersburg, a chandelier located in Tsarskoye Selo. This fact did not get due attention, and some days later Filippov was found dead at his home. His apparatus and papers were seized by the police.

The masters' conservatism soon revealed its "ideology" to me. This took a form that was strictly definitive and monarchical, with the thread of paternal authority running through the whole pattern: God the Father, the Tsar-father, the priest-father and the parent-father, the entire array being fettered together by an iron chain of incontestable norms, established "for all time".

I saw that the "masters" were indefatigably building up a "normal" life, but I had a feeling that they were doing this in a listless spirit, that they were not so much masters of their affairs, as fated to conduct them all their lives, after the example of their grandfathers and fathers.

They were in a state of constant irritation, loudly complaining of the burden of their "labour" and the anxieties they incurred from the necessity of controlling their workmen, humbly serving the "authorities", and defending themselves against money-bags bigger than they. I think that at times they themselves realised that, with the money they had already "made", they might have lived lives less joyless, trivial and wretchedly stupid, but on the contrary gayer and perhaps freer—and, on the whole, somehow different. In many of the "masters" one could feel a gnawing anxiety and even

some fear of the morrow; among themselves they made no secret of this frame of mind.

When a fit of the "blues" came over one of these "normal" gentlemen, making him kick over the traces, cast off the bonds of religion and the ancient tenor of family tradition, I could not help thinking that he was being driven by fear of the future. The "blues" could be triggered off by any of a variety of causes: perhaps a dog had howled with muzzle pointed skyward which meant that a fire would break out; the dog's head might have been lowered, so somebody was about to die; a hen had crowed like a cock—surely that spelt some strange calamity; if one met a priest, that promised a business setback. The endless range of evil omens would find some proof in certain happenings: fires and reverses did indeed take place; people did die; bankruptcies and utter ruin would come about; in many families long-drawn and usually futile struggles would rage between "fathers and sons". The fathers had amassed wealth from big industrial concerns they had started, but the sons felt no early urge to follow in their fathers' footsteps—they preferred spending to accumulating, or insisted on the need for new and risky methods of running or expanding the family business, or drifted away from their families by entering universities and becoming lawyers, doctors or teachers. By and large, business would be on the up-grade, of its own accord, as it were, but to the limited vision of individuals it would seem that everything was on the verge of rack and ruin, so that it was necessary to "keep the eyes peeled", and "watch one's step", or otherwise one might end up in the poorhouse.

"The soldier has his gun and the merchant his ruble," says the Russian proverb, and the "respectable" and "normal" gentry would hang about their necks rubles weighing tens and hundreds of poods. There was, however, a certain textile manufacturer I knew, a most "normal" man named Bakaldin, who on reaching the age of 60 began to read Chernyshevsky. When he understood some point in his reading, he would exclaim in amazement: "That's how I've been reduced from a respected man to a fool. Just imagine: after making money for 40

years and ruining and offending so many men, I now learn that money is the root of all evil!"

Another of these men, old Zamoshinkov, would shout: "The priests have been stuffing our minds with nonsense, and messing up our souls. What kind of damn god is up there on high if I, a rich man, have got to turn up my toes just like anybody else."

I have quoted some of the more outspoken complaints, but I could also quote dozens of inane, tame and colourless bits of grouching I heard. These were highly instructive, because they showed me that inwardly the "normal" life was sickly and out of joint. It was perfectly clear that despite their deep-rooted smug satiety and obtuse self-satisfaction, "normal" men were not quite sure of their own strength and felt that trouble was impending. They were building up their own kind of life, but within that life there appeared from somewhere a force antagonistic to their striving for quiescence and "a more or less stable equilibrium". They had a sort of "sense of history", which took the shape of legends about strokes of fabulously good luck and dramatic reverses that had attended upon men of power from among the nobility and the merchants. This sense of history told them that even the laurel-crowned victor does not always remain in the saddle. He perishes because good living has made him effete, or because he has forgotten that life is a struggle, this forgetfulness being exploited by somebody stronger than he, who gains the upper hand. At bottom, the "normal" man is a pessimist and misanthropist, which is the reason why he believes in a being who will reward him for his vicissitudes in this life. Of course hopes of bliss in the world to come prevent nobody from making the most of life on earth—good food, drinks, card-playing, seducing maidens and other such amusements—but neither do they prevent him from complaining about the burden of life.

Besides complaints from the Bakaldins and Zamoshinkovs, I did of course hear other voices and other thoughts, which were best of all voiced by the tavern-keeper Grachov during an argument with a former seminarist.

"One of the reasons why you keep on talking such twaddle is because you're a penniless beggar. Now here's something for you to put in your pipe: who is richer than anybody else in the world? God is. D'you get that? So what follows is that the richer I am, the nearer I am to God. A rich man is a big man. He's a law unto himself, and it isn't for a sponger like you to deny that law. You've just had your fill of fried spuds and downed a glass, so it's time you got out. I won't have you disturbing people's minds, and if you try to, you'll have dealings with the men in Gruzinsky Street!"

This was where political police headquarters were located.

It was not only from the rich and the strong that I heard such statements; they were often forthcoming from down-trodden townsfolk—artisans, factory workers and domestics. These recognised the masters' authority as lawful not only because they thought that "might is right" or "possession is nine points of the law", but also because of the influence of the church, which taught that "the rich are answerable to God", "glory and honour are for the rich" and the like.

The "normal" folk were semi-literate and obtuse, yet if the facts of life began to harass them, with little respect for their freedom of action, they not only carped and grumbled in louder tones, but even began to "think politically".

I might quote some typical instances. Once, when a group of building contractors were sitting in the courtyard of the gubernia architect's country villa, awaiting the chief's pleasure and discussing the state vodka monopoly, one of them, a bony little stone-mason named Trusov, said:

"It's all unfitting and wrong. The Tsar should keep away from trade. This monopoly is something you have to argue about, but you can't argue with the Tsar."

All agreed, with the exception of Shishkin, a plasterer, who objected that the Tsar was the boss of the show and could do whatever he pleased—trade in vodka or grain or anything else. Trusov, however, retorted screwing up his eyes:

"You've got that all wrong, Grigory. No, the Tsar shouldn't go in for things like that. Here's what I'll say: supposing I got under my thumb all the work that's going—your job, and the carpenter's and the joiner's—would you be pleased with the state of affairs?"

"Like hell I would," Grigory replied.

"Well, there you are."

Kurepin, the butcher's son, a Gymnasium pupil, once asked his father: "Dad, why did they murder the Tsar?"

"He must have stood wrong with somebody or other," the father said, but then, feeling he had not quite said the right thing, added gently but firmly, "You'd better ask that question in ten years or so, and meanwhile get all that right out of your head. We have another Tsar now."

Pyotr Vasilyev, a sectarian who had no use for priests and was well-known along the Volga as a man versed in "Gospel-lore", used to give practical instruction in "political science" to the merchants who carried on trade at the arcades. The nobles, he asserted, always did away with those tsars who tried to take away any of their privileges. That was why they murdered three of the best tsars there had ever been, to wit, Peter III, Paul I and Alexander II, because these rulers had wanted to enlarge the merchants' and the peasants' rights at the expense of the nobility's privileges. He had his own ideas of what was good for the peasants, for whenever he mentioned the "lewd" Empress Catherine, who was placed on the throne by the nobles after they had murdered her husband, he had harsh words to say about her for her "not daring" to give the merchants the same right to own serfs as had been enjoyed by the nobility. Incidentally, he himself was a peasant.

In *My Universities* I make mention of a policeman named Nikiforych, who spoke ornately of the Spider-Tsar. I can vouch for his having actually used the term.

I stored up such opinions and quips in my memory, and sometimes even committed them to paper, in the same way as Dmitry Lavrukhin evidently did, the man who wrote a remarkable book entitled *In the Hero's Footsteps*. This is a book that will well repay thought and study on the part of any young writer.

The "political" views aired by the "masters" derived particular emphasis from the fact that the censorship imposed on fiction writings prevented the latter from reproducing these views in a native and undisguised setting, and I had a naive faith in the testimony provided by literature. Saltykov-Shchedrin alone was able, with superb insight, to perceive politics in the facts of everyday life, but that was not the kind of life I knew, and, besides, I did not always understand Saltykov's Aesopian and wrathful language. However, when reading Gleb Uspensky I would expand his personages' speeches with words I had picked up from what I had seen of life.

Our literature has lost very much from the fact that this remarkable man and most gifted writer lived at too high a pace and in too great agitation, devoting so much of his strength to poisonously topical "things of the day", without giving much thought to the future.

I got the greatest amount of information about the "masters" in 1896, the year in which the All-Russian Exhibition and the Merchants' and Manufacturers' Congress were held in the city of Nizhni-Novgorod. In my capacity of correspondent of the *Odesskiye Novosti* and reporter of the *Nizhegorodsky Listok* I attended Congress sessions, where problems of foreign trade and customs and financial policy came up for discussion. I saw representatives of large-scale industry from all parts of Russia and heard their heated arguments with the "agrarians". I did not quite understand all that was being said but I sensed what was most significant: these men were enamoured of wealthy Russia, wished to win her heart and hand, and knew that she ought to be divorced from Nikolai Romanov (the tsar.—*Tr.*).

The Congress held its sessions in a school-building at the corner of Bolshaya Pokrovka and Mishkin streets, so I captioned a humorous sketch I had written for the *Nizhegorodsky Listok* "Matchmaking at Mishkin Street". The paper turned my story down, so I sent it on to Marakuyev of the *Odesskiye Novosti*, where all traces of it vanished.

Taking part in the sessions were men of the "first class"—wealthy manufacturers, big landowners, and learned

economists from the Ministry of Finances. Also there was D. Mendeleyev, the celebrated chemist, and some other professors, among whom I think there was Professor Yanzhul. All these were new to me, quite unlike the "normal" type I knew, and with a kind of flaw in their make-up: I could sense hesitancy and ambiguity in their speeches. This might have been merely an excess of a floridness, which some Congress members had borrowed from the intelligentsia for temporary use and mutual pleasantness. A few spoke of the people's sufferings and the impoverishment of the peasants, others of the decline in peasant morals caused by the factories, and at one session a large-headed man read the following verse in a deep voice:

Bowed beneath his holy burden,
Went in humble guise the Lord.
Blessing every town and village
With his beneficial word.*

I knew that all this was sheer invention, for nowhere do the Gospels speak of Christ ever sojourning in Russia. My impression was that the attitude of most pressmen towards the Congress was sceptical and noisy, and in general lacked seriousness. I, too, got into that frame of mind.

I found it more interesting and instructive to walk about the Exhibition grounds in the wake of small provincial manufacturers and traders, who attended the Exhibition in crowds. They reminded me of a swarm of lazy autumn bluebottles buzzing against the plate-glass pavillion windows, droning away, now in surprise but mostly in disapproval. These were a breed I was familiar with, and their "common" speech was something I knew and understood. Their talk centred on one basic theme—the welfare of the peasantry and the countryside. This was quite natural, for they had been "muzhiks" in the quite recent past, and were proud of the fact, because "God has given the Russian land to the muzhik" and "If the nobles are the body, the peasants are the skeleton",

* From a poem *These Poor Villages* by F. I. Tyutchev, a well-known Russian poet (1803-1873).—Ed.

as the sayings go. When they visited the Textiles Section of the Exhibition, these men agreed that factory-made linen, of the Givartovsky mills for example, was excellent, but homespun was no worse, and wore far better than the factory-made fabric. Besides, they argued, "You can't spin enough at the mills to clothe all the people, oh no," and carried on in the following vein: "You can't make enough even for the needs of actresses"; "It all goes to foreign parts"; "That's where our grain and leather go too"; "So does the fat"; "They'll soon be selling us there as common labourers"; "Yes, it's all for swank"; "And the muzhik hasn't got anything to buy or sell."

These are happenings that took place thirty-four years ago, but I can distinctly see before my eyes the bearded faces of all these "masters" from Pskov, Vyatka, the Siberian and other gubernias and regions. I remember their evident surprise and unmistakable dissatisfaction when they saw the Machinery Section. They smiled in embarrassment, smiled reluctantly, frowned, sighed and even seemed despondent. For some reason or other, a German printing machine had been installed there. I think the intention was to use it to print all sorts of exhibition publications. A withered little old man with a pointed beard, twinkling but cold reddish eyes, and fidgety hands said scoffingly of this machine: "That's a new-fangled devil of a machine. What's the use of it?" "To print newspapers," he was told. "Papers?" he blustered. "That kind of dung! How much does the machine cost?"

On hearing the price, the old man straightened his peaked cap, looked round, met smiles of approval, and said: "So that's where the money we pay for taxes goes—for newspapers! Well, I'll be. . . ." He thought better of his intention, compressed his lips and moved off, his top-boots squeaking, and his adherents following in his wake.

This group were invited to make an ascent in captive balloon. "Much obliged to you," said this selfsame old man in reply, and asked: "And if that bladder is let go, will it go up to where God is? Oh, it can't? Then why on earth should I dangle in mid-air like dung in an ice-hole?"

Practically every time I went to the Exhibition I would come across some similar organiser of the thoughts and moods of the "masters". I am absolutely sure that it was people of this very type who, eight years later, were to run provincial branches of the reactionary Union of the Russian People. However, the sum-total of these people did not provide me with a sufficient amount of material for the figure of Yakov Mayakin.

In a feature-story entitled *Bugrov*, the "hero" of the story says, "Mayakin is a remarkable person. I haven't seen anybody like him anywhere around me, but I feel that such a man must exist".

I am quoting these words not because they may be understood as reflecting credit on me, but because they are objectively valuable as proof that I was using the right method when I moulded a more or less complete and "living" figure of a medium-calibre "master" out of the mass of little facts I had observed among people of that category.

It was all very simple: I invested Yakov Mayakin with some of Friedrich Nietzsche's social philosophy. A critic once noticed this "forgery" and reproached me for what he termed my penchant for Nietzsche's teachings. There was of course no ground for that; I was a man of the "crowd", and the "heroes" brought forward by Lavrov, Mikhailovsky and Carlyle did not appeal to me; neither did the *Herrenmoral* so grandiloquently preached by Nietzsche.

The idea underlying Nietzsche's social philosophy is very simple: the real purpose of life is the creation of people of superior breed—"supermen", slavery being an essential accompaniment. The ancient Hellenic world achieved an unsurpassed level of development because it was based on the institute of slave-owning, but since then, under the influence of Christian democratism, the cultural development of mankind has been steadily declining; the political and social education of the working masses cannot prevent Europe's sinking back into barbarism, unless she recreates the foundations of the ancient Greeks' culture and rejects "slaves' morals"—i.e., the teaching of social equality. It is to be recognised that

people have always fallen into a minority—the strong, who are uninhibited, and a majority—the weak, who exist only to obey the former unquestioningly.

Created by a man who ended up in madness, this philosophy was indeed of and for the “masters”, but had nothing original about it. Its foundations had been laid down by Plato; on it was built Renan’s *Drames philosophiques*, and it was not unknown to Malthus. In general, this is a most ancient philosophy, the purpose of which is to justify the rule of the “masters”, who, indeed, never lose sight of it. It is quite probable that it was fostered in Nietzsche by the growth of Social-Democracy in Germany; in our time it is the fascists’ favourite spiritual food.

I got to know something of this philosophy in 1893, from some students who had been expelled from the Yaroslavl *lycée* and were making a living just as I was, by working as junior clerks for some lawyers. But even prior to that, in the winter of 1889-1890, my friend N. Z. Vasilyev had made a Russian translation of Nietzsche’s finest work *Also sprach Zarathustra* and had told me something about the author, qualifying his philosophy as “elegant cynicism”.

I had every reason to attribute to the Russian “masters” certain features inherent in their counterparts of antiquity. “Class ethics” and “masters’ ethics” are quite international. Nietzsche asserted that the strong must “cast the weak down”, which is one of the basic dogmas of the “masters’ ethics”. He called Christianity “the ethics of slaves”, a harmful thing which, he alleged, succoured the weak and the “faltering”, thereby uselessly wearing down the strong.

In the first place, it was not only the weak that fell along the way, but the strong as well, who had been knocked off their feet by the “masters”: this I was well aware of.

In the second place, the “masters” gave aid to the weak only when the latter could not be in the least dangerous to them—when they were already worn out physically, sick, and reduced to penury. This aid took the form of hospitals and poorhouses; those of the weak who

ventured to resist "law and morality" had prisons built for them. I read a good deal of the way in which the Christian masters of the cities waged a ruthless struggle against Christian feudal lords who were masters of the countryside; besides, these people were just as merciless towards their own kind. Besides, Zimmermann's splendid *Geschichte des grossen Bauernkriegs* described to me in the most vivid colours how knights and burghers united to annihilate the peasants and rout the Taborites, who were trying to implement on earth the idea of a primitive communism they had discovered in the Gospel. Finally, I had a certain acquaintance with the teachings of Marx. The "masters' ethics" were as alien to me as the "slaves'"; a third had developed in me: "Help him who has risen in revolt."

In my sketch entitled *Regarding the Harm of Philosophy* I have depicted my friend and teacher N. Z. Vasilyev, a man who never tried to instil his convictions in me, but merely told me about things, without the least attempt to make me follow him. All my other teachers did their best to make me imbibe what ideas they liked and what suited their "ideological" purposes. I was forced to defend myself against this brand of violence, and therefore was not to my teachers' liking. To this day such of them that are alive sometimes remind me of my intransigence in severe and angry tones.

Their antipathy was highly beneficial to me: they would argue with me as though I was almost an equal. I say "almost", because they were "qualified" people, with the advantage of secondary education, seminaries and universities, whereas, compared to them, I was "raw". I have always been reminded of my lack of "higher" education; this still goes on, I fully agree: I have had no "school" discipline of the mind, which is, of course, a serious shortcoming.

In their arguments with me some of my teachers revealed a serious shortcoming too: they combined two sorts of ethics within themselves—the "masters'" and the "slaves'". The former sprang from their highly developed intellect; the latter from their spinelessness and their reverence for the realities of life. They had tried to act

in revolutionary fashion, had "suffered", had seen the road leading to power blocked to them, which had sapped their "will to live" and created a frame of mind I call "anarchism of the defeated", so excellently described by Dostoyevsky in his *Notes from Underground*. This writer, once member of a study circle formed by Butashevich-Petrashkevsky,* a propagandist of socialism, was also among the "defeated", paying with penal servitude for his interest in socialism.

Further: I saw many "down-and-outs" at doss-houses, monasteries and along the roads, all of them people who had gone under as a result of an unequal struggle against the "masters", their own weakness for philistine "delights of life", or their swollen self-pride.

I have come in for criticism for having allegedly "romanticised tramps", placed groundless and vain hopes on the *lumpen*-proletariat, and even attributed to them a Nietzschean attitude of mind.

"Romanticised" them? That is hardly the case. I placed no hopes on such as these, but I shall not deny that I did supply them, as I did Mayakin, with certain features of Nietzsche's philosophy. However, I cannot assert that in either case I acted consciously, but I do think that I had every right to attribute "Nietzschean" anarchism to the "down-and-outs". Why is that so?

That is because these people, who had been dashed out of a "normal" life to drift into doss-houses and membership of low gangs, possessed definite features of psychological affinity with certain sets of "defeated" intellectuals. Here I made use of my author's right to "amplify" his material, and I think that life has fully justified this "trick of the trade". After the revolution of 1905-06 the "master" Yakov Mayakin became an Octobrist, while after October 1917 he revealed himself as a cynically undisguised and ruthless enemy of the working people. Between the "down-and-outs" of the doss-houses and the *émigré* political intriguers of Warsaw, Prague, Berlin and Paris

* Butashevich-Petrashkevsky, M. U. (1821-1866) was prominent in the liberation movement in Russia in the middle of the 19th century and leader of the political circle known as the Petrashevsky circle. Was exiled to Siberia in 1849.—Ed.

I see no difference other than the formally terminological. The "rogue" Promptov and the philosophising cardsharp Satin are still alive, but wear other raiment and are working for the *émigré* press, preaching the "masters' ethics" and in every way justifying their existence. This is their calling and their employment, and they are fully satisfied with the role of lackeys. From all that has just been said, it does not at all follow that the writer possesses a mysterious faculty of "foreseeing the future", but it does follow that he must take in everything going on around him, know the environment he lives in and the operation of the forces that move that life; a knowledge of the forces of the past and the present will enable him—with the aid of his power of amplification—to conceive the possible future.

Quite recently a new-fledged writer wrote the following to me:

I am not at all obliged to know everything, and besides there isn't anybody who knows everything.

I don't think that anything will come of this writer. On the other hand, here is what Vsevolod Ivanov, one of our most gifted writers, has written so well in *The Literary Gazette* (which, incidentally, does not always live up to its title):

The work of the artist is very arduous and highly responsible. Even more arduous and more responsible is the work of his readers, whose realism is and will be the realism of victors.

The artist stands in need of encouragement, but he stands in even greater need of that encouragement being innerly necessary and useful to him. For us, six Moscow writers, our visit to Turkmenia has, I think, been that very kind of encouragement. . . .

What V. Ivanov has in mind, I believe, is direct contact with the new way of life. Ignorance means a halt in development, marking time. Everything in the world is perceived in a state of motion and according to its motion; any force is nothing else but motion. Man is not at a standstill, but in the making, living in a process of "formation", of the development of his forces and qualities. In our days life is becoming ever more impetuous, phenomena following one another at tremendous speed. The creative energy of the Soviet Union's working class

teaches us a great deal and, incidentally, provides indisputable proof that mankind would have travelled a long way from the morass of filth and bloodshed it is floundering in, if its means of self-defence against nature and for better conditions of life were created with the same devoted energy and the speed with which they are being created by our working class.

Never before has life been so instructive and man presented such interest as in our time; never before has "progressive" man been so internally contradictory to such a degree. When I say "progressive" I mean not only the Party member, the Communist, but also those non-Party people who are animated by the freedom and the breathtaking sweep of socialist construction. This "contradictoriness" is natural, since people are living on the borderline between two worlds—one of them a world of the most varied and irreconcilable contradictions, and created prior to their time, and the other a world they themselves are building up and in which social and economic contradictions, which are the basis of all others, will be done away with.

Our critics complain that our literature does not depict the heroes of our time as "complete" and living beings, but as somewhat stiff and wooden people; some critics go so far as to even assert that "realism" is incapable of producing a vivid and finished portrait of the hero. The very quality of his calling makes the critic more or less a sceptic. He is always on the look-out for shortcomings, and more often than not he disguises that scepticism behind the purely cerebral "orthodoxy" of the priest. This unnatural combination of qualities inherent in the pike and the owl has given rise to much hullabaloo, but can hardly be beneficial to new writers. Besides, the tone used by critics in their dealings with writers is often marked by a show of "superiority" that is totally out of place, and offensive to young men of letters. This makes me ask myself whether or not our critics are free of the "masters' ethics", and whether they have an overweening opinion of their own gifts.

Personally I am of the opinion that "realism" would cope with its difficult task if, in considering the in-

dividual in the process of his development along the road from age-old philistine and feral individualism towards socialism, it depicted man not only such as he is today, but also such as he must and shall be tomorrow.

This does not mean that I advise "inventing" human character, but simply that I think the writer is entitled, and moreover is in duty bound, to "amplify" man. When he depicts the individual, the writer must learn to interweave into the warp and woof of his design features characteristic of that individual's class, both the good and the bad, and presented together, if the author is out to reveal a split mentality. I repeat that there is no need for "invention", because these are features that have existence in reality, some resembling warts, tumours and rudimentary organs like the vermiform appendix of the caecum, which likes to make trouble and has then to be removed, and others like the recently discovered endocrine glands which are perhaps embryos of new organs brought to life by the biological evolution of the organism and destined to bring about radical changes in it. This is, of course, a flight of fancy which I have indulged in "for the fun of it", but novices in the art of writing should remember a very simple thought: ideas cannot be extracted from thin air in the way nitrogen, for example, can be; ideas are created on earth, spring from the soil of labour, and use the material of observation, comparison and study, and, in the final analysis, facts and again facts!

What is necessary is a *factual* history of culture—a history of the development of classes, of class contradictions and the class struggle. Truth and wisdom spring from below, from the masses; the upper storeys of life merely breathe exhalations coming from below, mixed with odours that are alien to that life; in the main, these "speculative" ideological exhalations are meant to tone down, conceal or distort the stern and genuine truth inherent in labour.

The world of labour has reached a consciousness of the necessity of revolution. It is the task of literature to help him who has risen in revolt. The more energetically that aid is given, the sooner will the "faltering" collapse for all time.

III

I have been asked to speak on the theme "What was taught at study circles of the eighties, and how it was taught". I cannot say much on the subject because I had little time to attend these circles regularly. Still I had some dealings with them, some of which are preserved in my memory, so I shall try to tell you of that. In those days young people of my type may have been characteristically and profoundly impressed by the contradictions between literature and life, between the dogmas presented in books and the fruit of immediate experience.

I first found myself attending a "circle" when I was about fifteen. It all happened as follows. During a mass fisticuffs bout held in the traditional fashion in Nizhni-Novgorod, somewhere beyond the cemetery of St. Peter and St. Paul, I saw one of the participants of "my side" crawl out of the fray to seek shelter at the fence surrounding a timber-yard. Despite all his efforts he could not rise to his feet, so I came to his aid. Groaning, his face twisted in pain, he told me he had received a blow on his foot and he suspected a bone had been broken. He lived in the vicinity, and asked me to help him get home. I agreed, for I liked his round, smooth face and the clear and friendly expression in his eyes. Neatly dressed in a cloth jacket, sealskin cap and elegant top-boots, he called himself Vladislav and his surname was, I think, Dobrovolsky or Dobroklonsky. When I observed that people did not go to these fights in leather top-boots he replied wrathfully:

"I hate going about in felt boots."

From the expression of his face I could see that the pain was frightening him. He was on the verge of tears and unable to walk, so I had to carry him pick-a-back.

I carried him into his room, where everything was new and unfamiliar to me: it was large, well-lit and as grand as a shop, the air in it uncommonly warm and scented; on the floor lay a thick gay carpet, there were pictures on the walls, and in a corner I saw a stuffed yellow-eyed owl standing on a cabinet containing a variety of silverware and florid-style porcelain. A burly, bewhiskered gen-

tleman with tousled hair put in an appearance, in whose wake ran a thin agile little woman with huge eyes set in a pallid face. When the boy had been placed on a sofa, the father ripped the boot-top and then the vamp open with the aid of a razor and, after removing the entire boot asked in a rumbling voice, "Well, is it better now?"

"I want some tea!" replied the boy capriciously.

The lady placed a compress on the foot and bandaged it, her utter silence surprising me not a little.

"Careful!" groaned the boy, his voice rising.

For my part, I felt sorry about the fine boot that had been irrevocably ruined. Then I was given some wonderful tea with buns made of pink-coloured dough, the spicy taste of which lingered in my mouth for a long time afterwards. When they bid me good-bye, both father and son invited me to call again, which I did the following Sunday.

It transpired that Vladislav had suffered no fracture, but his ankle had been badly bruised. He hobbled about with the aid of a stick, but climbed with ease up a stair leading to the attic where his room was located. There he boastfully showed me his handsomely bound books, including *A Life of Napoleon* with illustrations by Horace Vernet, and a lot of other books with pictures in them. He had words of praise for Ganot's *Cours de physique* and a novel by Karazin entitled *In the Smoke of Gunpowder*, but when I asked for the loan of these books he refused to let me have them, with the words:

"I can't do that; these are expensive books."

I found him a colourless and dull sort of fellow, who was always talking. His speech, however, was so flat that nothing he said made the least impression on my memory. During the entire course of our acquaintance I was surprised only by an angry complaint he made about his father:

"I hate these foolish fisticuffs fights, but father keeps sending me there. He says it is an ancient Russian sport and you've got to keep up with the people. What on earth will he think up next?"

He had an unpleasant way of repeating, "I hate this and I hate that."

I saw that he had much that was pettish in his make-up: he was pampered and capricious; his face was pretty-pretty, with a smile that was cloying in its sweetness. Though three years my senior, he just reached my shoulder. He had had six years of Gymnasium schooling, had then spent a whole year abroad with his father and stepmother, and was now preparing for an army cadet school.

"When I am an officer I'll organise a plot against the tsar," he said, puffing at a cigarette and, after a heavy stab at the floor with his stick, he knit his delicate eyebrows in a frown. I paid no attention to these words, but recalled them long afterwards, when I was living in Kazan.

This was our second meeting and he produced such an unpleasant impression on me that I determined to leave and never come again. As I was preparing to do so, heavy steps sounded on the stairs, and his father came into the room in a smoking jacket, felt boots, an amber cigarette-holder between his teeth. He was followed by a lanky bespectacled Gymnasium student in a Russian blouse, another young fellow, merry-looking and dandyish, and a dark-haired girl with a long and severe face. I rose to depart, but Vladislav's father asked morosely, "Where are you off to? I want you to meet these young people. Sit down and listen."

He sat down at the table, produced a tobacco pouch from a pocket, rolled himself a cigarette, and bellowed:

"And you're late again. That's too bad. Won't the others turn up? Why won't they? Sick, are they? Poppycock! I suppose they are out skating."

In the same booming and morose voice he asked me what kind of books I had been reading. I named several titles.

"That's tosh," was his comment. "You should read serious books, my friend, not verses or novels."

He went on to say that it was a crime that so many people were living at the expense of the peasants, and that everything possible should be done to ease the muzhik's lot. I had no feeling that I was a burden on the peasant's shoulders; on the contrary, my impression was

that my own shoulders provided a comfortable resting place for people more or less unpleasant to me, but I wanted to go on listening to the booming, reproachful voice of the bewhiskered gentleman, with his puffy, good-natured face, his oversize, ill-shapen nose and his bleary eyes which for all the world reminded one of the sad eyes of an intelligent dog. He spoke in simple terms, warming up in the process, smacking his lips and emitting clouds of smoke. His eyes grew wider and wider, and then would suddenly screw up as he snapped his fingers, then he would tug at his right whisker and ask, raising his chin: "D'you get me, brother? One man does the ploughing and the mowing, but seven mouths do the eating. He does all the hard work but we live like drones."

He carried on in this vein for over an hour, informing me that Russia was a slow coach which lagged far behind Europe. This, however, was a bit of good luck, for the Russian people stood closer to Christ than the peoples of Europe did. Furthermore, I learnt that the Russian had the collective "artel" spirit in him, and that the rights of the peasant communities should be extended so that entry should be made available to all: when each man had his own plot of land, all would live in peace and good will.

"D'you see, brother? That's the root of the whole problem."

I could understand some of the things he said and even felt pleased, perhaps because I was able to make out the sense of such words. I listened with the keenest attention, but could see that the young men were bored. They kept on whispering to one another, smoking away all the time, and eyeing the girl with annoyance. Very soon the room was so full of tobacco smoke that the faces seemed to be floating in a blue haze. The young lady too had assumed a bluish tinge. Her unwinking eyes were fixed on the speaker and she seemed to be studying the greyish stubble sprouting on our mentor's fat cheeks.

I left the house feeling as though I was carrying away with me a kind of strangely pleasant weight which, far from being burdensome, made me feel stronger. The two or three other visits I paid on the house did not provide

me with anything more significant than what I had heard previously. Perhaps such things were said, but I simply failed to grasp them.

Vladislav's father kept on harping on the same theme, praising the muzhiks for their "artel" spirit and their simple but profound wisdom. He also read to us verses by Nekrasov and Nikitin, as well as one of Saltykov-Shchedrin's stories entitled *About Two Generals*. On one occasion he came up to the attic somewhat lit up and tormented by the hiccups. This hampered his speech; he kept swallowing glass after glass of beer, and finally, quite overcome by drink, he attempted to teach his son, me and a young dandy how to sing some kind of blind men's song. Suddenly he burst into tears, began shaking his head, and said in a croaking but loud voice:

"That's how we are living. That's how!"

I could no longer tolerate the son. I disliked his rudeness towards his father and the fact that he even raised his voice in addressing the latter. His behaviour towards his stepmother was even stranger. He spoke to her in capricious and languid tones, drawling out the words, and I could see that he did so on purpose so as to humiliate her. I have no recollection of her ever pronouncing a single word. She was rapid in her movements, which were noiseless, and she walked with a kind of sideways motion, extending her left arm forward from the elbow, as though she were blind. In me she evoked a feeling of pity and the strange impression of a person eager to escape but unable to find the door to liberty. Finding the atmosphere of the house stifling and intolerable, I stopped coming there and very soon left for the city of Kazan.

This acquaintance was of definite importance to me, for hitherto I had known nothing of peasant life and the peasant community. I realised keenly that life was a tough business, and was glad to have learned that I was living in a land where a good and easy life was possible and indeed could be brought about very simply: the only thing required was for all people, including myself, to become members of rural communities. The "artel" spirit was no doubt present in me: people had often said of me, "Yes, he's the 'artel' kind of lad!"

I had some knowledge of gangs of carpenters, navvies, bricklayers and wool-carders, and, as I saw it, life in these artels flatly contradicted everything that Vladislav's father understood by the "artel" spirit. Friendship was at a discount in the artels, whose members hardly realised the need for mutual aid. A constant struggle for power went on in each artel, the strong and the cunning bossing the weak and the stupid—that was something I could well see. I saw too that very few artel members were willing or able to do the job with thoroughness, eagerness, or joy. Of course such people did exist: these evidently were the forerunners of our *udarniks* of today, but they were not popular among the other artel members, who had hard words for them as they thought that such people were trying merely to get into the contractors' good books and were after foremen's jobs. But when the contractors promised what was known as "vodka money" the men would put their backs into the job and have curses for those who could not stand the pace.

"You there! You're right on the spot when it comes to drinks, but where are you when the job's got to be done!" they would yell.

I was fond of reading collections of proverbs, but I discovered few proverbs with words of praise for the artel way of life and work. Despite all this, I came to Kazan with an "idea" on my mind, and predisposed in favour of the artel, the peasant community and the muzhik, from whom I could learn how to live in simplicity of mind and in wisdom. I even boasted a little on my familiarity with the "idea", thereby earning words of praise. "A youngster, but his head's screwed on the right way," was the opinion voiced by some. I made no secret of what I had observed in artel life and its lack of the "artel spirit", which led to my being made fun of, on the pretext that I was wrong and had the wrong kind of artel in mind.

During the first three or four months of life in Kazan I was an assiduous member of a study circle of Gymnasium scholars and University first-year students, which met on Saturday and Sunday evenings to read John Stuart Mill, with commentaries by Chernyshevsky; however, I

felt more drawn to Yeleonsky-Milovsky's circle, whose members were more ordinary folk, like Anatoly, a house-painter and glazier, a lad of my own age and highly gifted; two joiners, Polikarpov, a cross-eyed lad who was apprentice to a watchmaker, and another fellow aged twenty, named Kabanov, if I am not mistaken. Very soon this circle was joined by a Gymnasium scholar called Gury Pletnyov, who was entrusted with "liaison work". Listening to the reading and discussion of political economy was hard and dull work, this kind of spiritual fare proving too tough for my mind. Some time later I was put through a kind of examination consisting of a *précis* of what I had heard and digested. The only abstract I wrote during my studies, and the outcome of much effort with the aid of Anatoly and Kabanov, was so poor a piece of work that the leader of our circle, who was a student at an academy of theology, said to me with displeasure, "You haven't made head or tail of the whole business!"

However unpleasant it was to hear this opinion of my work, I felt it was only the truth. What I had written was not an abstract, but some critical argument regarding a certain sentence, which I can quote word for word, for I was reminded of it several months ago:

From the field of historical events we must go over to the field of abstract thought, which, instead of the facts of history, operates with abstract figures, whose meaning is conventional and which are intended for convenience.

Nobody had as yet explained to me what was meant by "abstract thought" and "abstract figures" or the purpose or "convenience" they were "intended" for. Anatoly knew nothing of such things either, while Kabanov, after some thought, uttered his favourite expression, "It's all cockeyed!"

We bent every effort to make out the sense of the words "abstract thought", but were in no way able to "abstract" ourselves from the clutches of the life that held us in a vice-like grip.

Rubbing his high brow and pinching the lobe of his left ear, Kabanov would say that, in general, books depicted

things much more simply than they existed in real life, something that might be convenient for the understanding but all wrong nevertheless.

"Writers look at the street from round the corner," was his verdict.

After this setback I was never again asked to write any abstracts, and very soon I felt I was not wanted in so serious a study group. Yeleonsky's circle read articles on such subjects as the domestic industry, the artel and the community, the Serbian "Zadruga" (patriarchal rural community.—*Tr.*), hereditary leaseholding of land, and sectarianism. We liked Yadrintsev's book *The Community in Prison and in Exile*, and all this we considered serious food for the mind. Andrei Derenkov's private and illegal library contained selections of bound magazine articles on a variety of subjects, and I distinctly remember that a collection entitled *The Status of Woman* contained, besides articles by Tkachov, Shashkov and other authors, an article by Archbishop Chrisanph. Of course, fiction by writers of the sixties and the seventies enjoyed the highest popularity with us.

At this point I must say a few words about Kabanov. He joined company with Anatoly and myself for about two months, no longer. I met him about seven or eight times, but after each time we saw each other I wanted to forget the fact of his existence.

"He's a chap we can't cope with," Anatoly said of him.

Kabanov's appearance was far from prepossessing: he was lanky, with a short body set on spindly legs. He seemed made up of two unequal halves: his right shoulder was higher than his left, his left arm longer than his right, and his feet too seemed of different sizes. He almost invariably kept his left hand behind his back, under a faded and shabby jacket. The heels of his boots were worn down on one side—the right. Viewed from behind he looked as though he were lame. In general, he stood and walked in a crooked fashion, and whenever he came to a stand-still for a moment, he was in the habit of leaning with his right shoulder against the nearest wall, fence or tree. His large head, with its wisps of dark, sparse hair, swung moodily on a long neck; the skin on the high forehead

and the cheeks was of a drab colour; the face was flat, with the nose too small to suit it; the lips were thin and seemed bitten, and under the tufty and frowning eyebrows cold bluish eyes looked upon the world through narrow slits. His unattractive appearance went together with coarseness of speech, which was always interlarded with a stream of oaths, though he spoke in low and dispassionate tones, without the least gesticulation.

"Just like a drain-pipe in autumn," was Anatoly's definition of his speech.

I do not remember Kabanov ever laughing, but his smile was most unpleasant—the thin lips became even more compressed, and the drab skin on his cheeks wrinkled upwards to close his eyes. His father was an ex-soldier employed as watchman at some government office. The son did not live with him.

"I had to get away," he explained, with a practical illustration of the way his father's hands, as well as many others, had thrashed, drubbed and basted him. He had attended the city elementary school but had been expelled from the third class. His father had apprenticed him to a furrier; then he had worked for a Tatar at a tannery, later becoming a lamp-lighter, but everywhere he had been a misfit. During the slack periods he would make his way to the stagnant little town of Arsk, where he had an uncle who was a policeman.

"My uncle is a wise codger, but my father's a swine," he said calmly and confidently. He had no job at the moment, and made no secret of the fact that he was cohabiting with a woman who sold toys.

He was most unpleasant, and his talk irritated and even angered us, but despite all this there was something in him that attracted us, the magnet of a sorrowful and stern truth.

"He's a rotter," Gury Pletnyov said of him with a frown, "but the damn fellow knows such a lot!"

Kabanov's reading was slighter than ours, but he really knew much more than we did. He had a mistrust of books and articles. "A book is only a book, my boys," he would say. "It's much better to take a sniff for yourselves to find out what things smell of. When I light up a fag

and start taking a think, it's much cleverer than just reading."

He had read all the historical novels written by Zagoskin, Lazhechnikov and Masalsky, as well as the inevitable Mayne Reid, J. Fenimore Cooper, Aimard, and Jules Verne, but annihilated all such literature with a single word pronounced through clenched teeth: "Rubbish!"

Yeleonsky-Milovsky seemed to think highly of Kabanov, to whose questions he would listen attentively, replying to them in detail. He often talked to Kabanov in whispers, and several times told him to remain behind as he shepherded us out of his rooms. For his part, Kabanov would look askance at Yeleonsky-Milovsky, addressing him in a sullen and disrespectful tone, refusing to read the books he recommended and demanding others in their stead. Neither Anatoly nor I had any liking for the circle leader; he was a vague sort of person, and he spoke in a way that was bookish and humdrum.

"His talk is like charcoal grown cold," was Anatoly's definition.

Of course we did not realise what risks Yeleonsky was running, so his conspiratorial cautiousness both amused and offended us; he would receive us in his basement in Georgievsky Street in the fashion of a "fence" receiving thieves.

"He's soft," Kabanov said of him. "Why the hell do you fellows just hang on his lips? You and your endless questions! Him and his blah, blah, blah! Alright, suppose we do no end of reading! What comes next?"

The trouble was that we did not put endless questions and did not ask ourselves "what comes next?"

Yeleonsky-Milovsky conducted discussions with us on V. V. Bervi-Flerovsky's *ABC of the Social Sciences*, and though his speech was flat and colourless we did get to realise that it was only the peasant's labour that could be considered useful, since "it is from this labour that there springs all the simple and wise truth of life, all the light and warmth for the soul". It was the duty of the town-dweller to serve the peasantry, dedicating all his thoughts and strength to the task. Everything we read was supposed to confirm the incontestability of this truth.

Indeed, we thought that this truth and no other was brought out in all books.

"A pack of lies," was Kabanov's remark, made in a lazy but determined way, when he heard me and Anatoly telling Pletnyov of our impressions after reading a sketch by Zlatovratsky entitled *Peasant Jurymen*. He then went on to speak unhurriedly of life in the villages, of the village kulaks, of fathers who forced their daughters-in-law to cohabit with them, of husbandless peasant women, and in general of women's hard life in the villages. He had many hard things to say of peasants serving in the army. His low and lumbering speech, copiously interlarded with sluggish oaths, emerged from between his thin lips together with wreaths of greenish shag-tobacco smoke. The contortions of his face, his ceaseless coughing and winking produced an impression that something was smouldering within him, ready at any moment to flare up and scorch others. However, nothing in him ever flared up or seared others, and he spoke of everything in an unruffled manner, as though it were inevitable and irremovable. This was depressing to us, but of course only for a while.

"Take Nikolai Uspensky," he would say. "He is a man who writes the truth and nothing but the truth. So does Reshetnikov, and as for the other Uspensky—well, we've got to think the matter over. You can't whitewash a wall that has been tarred, as the saying goes."

We were eager to argue with him, but we lacked the means. Our knowledge of village life came from books, while Kabanov was familiar with rural life not only in Kazan Gubernia, but Simbirsk and Vyatka gubernias too.

"Vyatka Gubernia is poorer," he told us parenthetically, "but people are more literate there." We checked up on this fact and discovered that it was true.

His appraisal of the testimony provided by literature might be summed up as follows: what was bad must be true, but what was positive must be "a pack of lies". Both Anatoly and I knew from personal experience that there was more evil than good in life; moreover, it was only in books that we had seen goodness. The "hearts of gold" we met in books were most affecting, and in general the

characters there were so genteel and smoothly polished—we had met none such in life. Yeleonsky and the other enlighteners did not seem to us in any way reminiscent of Svetlov, Stozharov and other characters in books by Zlatovratsky, Omulevsky, Mordovtsev, Zasodimsky, Nefedov and so on, but nevertheless we were reluctant to agree with Kabanov, possibly because:

Self-lauding lies to us are dearer
Than any self-debasing truth.

Another reason was that we were eager to enter a haven that would prove ideologically convenient, and the *Narodnik* movement seemed to us a sufficiently convenient place, so though we felt that there was much truth in what Kabanov said, this very fact heightened our dislike of him.

“Let’s go to Arsk on Assumption Day,” he persisted. “We’ll stay at my uncle’s, and he’ll tell you quite a lot about life in the villages.”

“Him who’s a policeman?”

“What of it? He’ll tell you much more than any professor will. He doctors you, but he doesn’t boss like a priest, who orders you to believe every word he says.”

In the autumn Kabanov disappeared, but this was something we had no regrets about, and for some time we did not even recollect him, I think. But recollect him we did, somewhat later, and on more than one occasion. When I began to work at a pretzel-bakery, I had to discontinue attendance at the circle for about a year and a half, and I had few opportunities to meet intellectuals. At the bakery twenty-six men were employed making pretzels, and another five baking bread. As I had observed during my frequent spells of employment at pretzel-bakeries run by Donovan and Kuvshinov, bakers were “lent out” to other master-bakers when a big or important order came in. This gave me ample opportunity to see the lives of hundreds of pretzel-bakers at close quarters, and the slowly spoken, bitter words “what is bad must be true” often arose in my memory.

The pretzel-bakers all came from the same part of the Kazan Gubernia, I forgot exactly where, but I have a recollection of some of the village names, such as

Karguza, Sobakino and Kletni. I enjoyed a kind of special status among my workmates, which led to their inviting me to visit them during Easter week. I accepted, and for two weeks made a round of festive visits from one village to another; I drank a lot of vodka, though I did not like it, took the side of my hosts whenever a fight took place, and amused the elder peasants of both sexes by addressing the girls in polite tones instead of "pawing" them. Such behaviour was a source of surprise and ridicule, so that old Kuzin, a pious man who informed against us to our employer, for which he was called Judas by his workmates, said to me in a didactic tone:

"You shouldn't turn up your nose at the girls, or play the saint. There are no muzhiks among the saints."

I replied that I was not playing the saint, but I was not a muzhik either.

"It's all the same," he said. "Birds of a feather must flock together."

I don't remember what I actually thought on hearing these words but I might well have asked myself whether it was the "artel spirit" that spoke in Kuzin's words. Some twenty years later I called his words to mind after reading Leonid Andreyev's *Darkness*.

By that time the "dark sides of Russian life" could no longer surprise me very much, but still almost each of the villages I stayed at dumbfounded me with scenes with too much originality about them. I think it was in the village of Kletni that some of the local lads played the following prank: they were seeing three girls home from a neighbouring village, when they fell upon them, turned up their skirts over their heads and tied the hems together. This was termed "making tulips". Then they tied the girls' hands and left them there. Somehow or other the girls managed to reach their village and raised their menfolk, who grabbed stakes and whatever makeshift weapons they could lay their hands on, and went on the warpath. A clash was averted only by the fact that the attacking forces, who had had some "booze", fell to fighting among themselves.

There was a herdsman in Karguza, the sounds of whose reed-pipe I often heard in the morning. His nickname

was Heifer's Sweetheart because he practised sodomy. The way he played his reed-pipe was really extraordinary, and he knew a host of wonderful old melodies. Over fifty years of age, he looked a handsome and impressive man, with his greying curly hair and his pleasant eyes, which were clear and thoughtful.

I did not at first believe the talk about his sodomy, till one evening when I saw a group of village boys round him near the windmill. He was telling them all sorts of stories that were horrible in their cynicism, and I was particularly taken aback by one of them, to the effect that two saints of the church—to wit the cunning Nikolai the Miracle-Worker and the bibulous St. Kasyan—both cohabited with a village woman, who was unmarried. They deceived each other most artfully for some time, but finally St. Kasyan caught his rival napping and gave him a drubbing. In punishment God deprived St. Kasyan of his name-day, with the result that St. Kasyan's Day is celebrated by the church once every four years, while St. Nikolai has two special days in the year.

Prior to hearing the story from this herdsman, I had read something of the sort in a collection of stories, where the quarrel between the two holy men was of course presented in a different light and the cause was different, but in both instances the legend smacked of heathen times. My impression was that the herdsman had himself modified the ancient story, making it wittier and more humorous, and this enhanced the impression I had of him.

Yet my friend Osip Shatunov reproached the narrator with a sigh: "You're a clever sort of fellow, Nikita. Why do you have to go in for such beastly things?"

"What d'you mean by beastly? There's not much difference between a wench and a sheep. The sheep keeps mum, so no one's any the worse." Nikita carried on in this vein for several minutes to the accompaniment of guffaws, and the things he said were foul and indecent in the highest degree.

In the village of Sobakino, the elder publicly beat and even kicked his stepson, a boy of about twelve; then he dragged the boy's mother, a handsome and pert woman,

by the hair along the street, yet not a soul in the crowd that witnessed the scene would intervene. My friend Artyom wanted to do something about the matter but he was brusquely told not to "poke his nose" into a purely family affair.

On the second day of Easter a peasant of a little village nearby got such a beating that he died of his injuries. At night his widow would visit his grave at the local cemetery, to shed tears over it. Compassionate people would gather to watch her. On one occasion five peasants, two men and three women, stood under some white willows, watching her and listening to her wailing. The graveyard was a small place, overgrown with weeds and crowded with graves, some of which had fallen into neglect, revealing the rusty-coloured soil; one of the trees leaned earthwards as though it were about to fall, and among the rank weeds the crosses stood without the least semblance of order, like so many drunken men, arms spread, on the verge of collapse. The woman sat on the damp earth, her back bent, just like a shapeless heap of rags. Her subdued wailing produced a weird impression; one of the women said vengefully, "It's her turn now! Her husband made plenty of others cry!"

A thin little peasant who was standing near me muttered, "It's easy for a woman, but a man finds it hard to shed tears, because they might give him dropsy."

Scenes of this kind left a life-long impress in my heart and mind. What cold and dreary nights Artyom and I spent, sitting till dawn at the storehouse. Even now the memory of that time is very much like lifting a burden that is beyond my strength. Through the motley gloom of the past I have a blurred recollection of the greyish mist of an April night, the abrupt fields, the patches of bare soil, the black outlines of the trees, the cottages resembling little heaps of rubbish, and the drab sky overhead, with a splinter of moon over the windmill. Artyom hated village life, using bad language and striking himself on the chest with his fists when he spoke of it. He was an excitable fellow, verging on the hysterical.

"Leave this place," I advised him.

"Where should I go to?" he asked. "I'd have to become a tramp."

It was only too true: he had nowhere to escape to. We sat on in silence, and during those hours I forgot all about the books I had read, which gave such cloying and beautiful accounts of peasant life and lauded the peasant's "simple-hearted wisdom"; I forgot all about the articles I had read which spoke of the socialism inherent in the peasant community and of the "artel spirit". All the depressing and numerous impressions I had received were in glaring contradiction to all the testimony provided by literature, and at times the thought arose in me that the writers were deliberately silent about certain aspects of life, for the reason that it was distressing and shameful to write of such phenomena.

The owner of the bakery, a clever sort of man though much addicted to the bottle, conceived a high opinion of my literacy, which was of course "relative", and my skill at the job and he shifted me to bread-making with a rise of two rubles a month, so that I was now getting a wage of five rubles. He would come over to me of a night, fix his eyes on me, incidentally they were of different colours, and mutter to me in an instructive tone:

"All people are swine," he would say. "All of them, down to the last man, whether they are of the gentry, the police or the church. The women are no better. Neither are the peasants. I come of peasant stock, so I ought to know. You've got to make your way in life, and keep away from people. D'you get me? I know everything you keep talking about: there are no secrets from me. You're just wasting your breath. You should try to get on in life and win promotion. You go on working for me another year or so, and I'll make you my assistant and place you at the counter selling bread. . . ."

My employer was a strange and fearsome creature, and it was all so strange—this man, who bore so little resemblance to anything human, was master of over thirty men, of whom at least ten were far more human than he was. It was strange that books did not provide depictions of the "master" type: in literature I did not find much that I saw in the life around me. I had little time for read-

ing then, for my working day lasted for fourteen hours, and even sixteen on the eve of holidays and fair days.

When I changed my job and started working at Andrei Derenkov's bakery, I found myself in a superior environment. This was made up of students attending the University, the Academy of Theology and the Institute of Veterinary Medicine. Now I had more free time, and I began reading in the voracious fashion a starving man falls upon bread. That is something I have discussed elsewhere.

On rare occasions I was "exhibited" as "a man of the people" at evening affairs arranged by intellectuals, to which I was invited, most usually to Professor Vasilyev's. At such evenings heated arguments would take place regarding the "destiny of the people", and I strained every nerve to make out how such clever people wished to alter that "destiny". I was particularly interested in a certain Brodov, or perhaps it was Bodrov, a little old man with spectacles on his long and sharp nose, a yellowish beard and a paunch embellished with a heavy silver chain, from the middle of which there swung a gold medal as big as a fifty-kopek coin. His short, thin and yellowish fingers were continually toying with the medal, which for some reason or another led me to think that this old gentleman must be more intelligent than all the rest and knew better than all of them what had to be done. That, I thought, was the reason why he looked on all people with disdain. As he listened to the discussion around him, he would smile and crane his neck, so that it seemed that the prominent nose was darting forward, all this making him resemble the marsh bird known as the bittern. He never agreed with anybody or anything. The emancipation of the serfs, he asserted, had not done the people any good but had only perverted them, for after that event "the muzhik had gone into trade"; it was only the Slavophiles, he went on to say, that understood the real "Russian truth", and "the narrow paths of Europe are not suited to the free and open-hearted character of our people". The old man spoke in a subdued voice, but his delivery was most distinct, his favourite pronouncement being, "That's all stuff and nonsense."

On his face, through his glasses, there gleamed inflamed eyes with fine red veins criss-crossing the whites, the greenish pupils the colour of copper oxide.

"The landed nobility," he said, "are no enemies to the muzhik, but his guide and teacher. The real enemy is the merchant, that is to say just another muzhik, trader or manufacturer. You can't prove the reverse."

I retained all this in my memory, then took it down, later asking some of the students I knew to let me have books about the Slavophiles. I was held up to ridicule.

The most frequent and vehement objections to the old gentleman came from a stout and tall lady with a big red face and fat cheeks that almost completely closed up her eyes and gave a pout to her lips. However, when she grew angry and began to raise her voice, it appeared that her mouth was big enough and sharp-tongued into the bargain, her voice booming out for all the world like the wind in a chimney-flue. If the old gentleman would begin, "Even your Gleb Uspensky, if you understand him properly..." this lady would shout, "I know Uspensky personally..."

"Kolyupanov has proved..."

"You are wrong! I know Kolyupanov personally."

Her absolute confidence that anybody she knew personally was the gainer thereby influenced all her listeners in her favour. I, too, thought that a person who knew so many people "personally" must be highly intelligent, but she seemed to me both stupid and ridiculous. Pletnyov thought so too; indeed, he even voiced a desire to "stuff up her mouth with a hat".

"You don't pay attention to the things you ought to!" he reproached me.

My impression was that my attention was turned in the right direction. I considered people far more interesting and worthy of notice than their speech.

A certain student at the Academy of Theology, who was an ardent *Narodnik*, told the old gentleman that the muzhik was the chief builder of life and was a grander figure than Peter the Great, to which the old man replied coolly, playing with his watch-chain:

"This Peter of yours wasn't at all great, but a madman. It's a pity he did away with his son Alexei, and not the

other way round. The muzhik has been building away for over a thousand years, and all to no purpose. That's how it is. . . ."

I felt no liking for the old man, but "he made himself understood", to quote Muzykantsky, a first-year undergraduate, a lanky fellow with long hair and a sad face, who died a short while later. I think he shot himself. It was far more difficult to understand the old man's opponents. Just as I did, Pletnyov and other first-year students I knew—Greiman and Komlev—complained of the discordance among the intellectuals.

Nevertheless, this variance of opinion had its good points for me; it made me remember the names of authors and the titles of books; I had to unearth and read them, and try to link up what I knew and had seen with that which books told me of. These things, however, did not blend, probably because the sum of my immediate observations of life mounted faster than the knowledge I was able to cull from books, and also because the fundamental or underlying idea in literature did not throw light on many facts of life. It all ended up in Pletnyov and myself feeling distrust in the testimony provided by literature, as our interest in it developed.

"There it is, the fabulous sweep of the Russian character!" was Pletnyov's enthusiastic reaction to reading Naumov's* *Cobweb*, but after reading a sketch by Pomyalovsky, he said in a sad and thoughtful tone, "This thing describes the same kind of savagery as *Cobweb*."

It was of course the muzhik that we needed and should understand. This was a problem that literature was always harping on and that our teachers and guides were always heaving on to our none too robust shoulders; as I have already mentioned, we accepted as the truth all the fundamental *Narodnik* dogmas. Our difficulty was to draw the border-line between our faith and our knowledge.

In those years the figure of Gleb Uspensky stood in the limelight, giving rise to most heated arguments. Some stated that by revealing how strong "the power of the soil" was, he had incontrovertibly established the truth

* Naumov, N. I. (1838-1901)—Russian *Narodnik* writer whose best works described the hard life of the Russian peasantry.—Ed.

and justice of *Narodnik* theory; others vociferously called him a "traitor". Our little group's reception of the hysterical lyricism in his peasant stories was an emotional one, similar to the way we might have reacted to music. Uspensky brought up in us an acutely disturbing emotion and turned our thoughts to burning topical issues. Greiman described this feeling very neatly when he said that after reading Uspensky he had an urge to perform some resolute act, something like the people of Brussels who, after the *première* of Meyerbeer's opera (*Le prophète*) marched to the King's palace to demand a constitution. The trouble was that in Kazan there was neither opera-house nor king; true, we had a governor resident in the city but we realised that governors did not issue constitutions. We knew too that, besides the saintly muzhiks depicted by Zlatovratsky and Karonin there existed most unsaintly muzhiks of the type revealed by Reshetnikov and Nikolai Uspensky; that equally unprepossessing working people and craftsmen were to be met in St. Petersburg; that in the Siberian goldfields there were workers whose morals were just as unbridled as the merchants', and that quite close at hand, in the Sukonnaya Sloboda district of Kazan, drunkenness and rowdyism were to be seen in abundance.

"Something has got to be done," Pletnyov kept saying, and with his aid I started preparing myself for the role of village school-teacher.

A sad and memorable impression was made on us by a man who had returned from exile. He was turning grey, and his beard was unkempt, his face long and bony, and his hooked nose seemed carved of bone. We met him at the house of a certain Perimov, who was a doctor, one hot summer evening, I think, but though the newcomer was heavily and warmly clothed, he did not look hot; at least no sweat was to be seen on his face. In his high hunting-boots which were strapped below the knees, he looked all creased and crumpled, as though his clothes had just dried after he had crossed some bogs and marshes in a rainstorm. In an arid and unyielding voice he most impressively pronounced a kind of panegyric upon Gleb Uspensky, Lavrov and Mikhailovsky. He began his talk

with an account of unsuccessful attempts made to conduct revolutionary propaganda among the workers, who had brought forth a lot of *agents provocateurs*; he said that it had not been Degayev who had ruined the *Narodnaya Volya*, but a worker named Merkulov. He then went on to prove at length that those who stood for industrial development were in essence servants to the merchants, and he wound up on a highly familiar note: it was the duty of all honest people to fight for the preservation and development of the Russian village commune—the *mir*, and against those who asserted that the muzhik too should help turn the wheels of the soulless machine civilisation.

His audience consisted of about twenty reputable-looking gentlemen and five youths, and when he had ended a long and awkward silence set in, the guests coughing and looking at one another, after which one of the company, a bald gentleman in the civil-service uniform with gold buttons, rose, sniffed at the flowers on the window-sill and cautiously and in crabwise fashion made his way into the next room. The irksome silence lasted at least another two minutes.

“What devils they are,” Pletnyov whispered to me.

The speaker sat staring at the table and passing his fingers through his tousled beard. Then he asked, “Well, what are we going to speak about?”

The host suggested going into the next room for tea. “We can talk there,” he said.

About five or six of the guests followed the returned exile into the other room, and the rest left. We followed suit.

“A swinish way to behave,” said Pletnyov. “We’ve all offended the man. Did you notice his bitter smile when he followed our host?”

I had not, but still I had an uneasy feeling; perhaps I thought that we had all silently turned away from the truth.

When, some time afterwards, I called on Pletnyov at his stepfather’s house in Sobachy Street, I noticed that my friend’s fingers were stained violet.

“I can’t wash it off,” he told me, explaining that he had been entrusted with the mimeographing of some

illegal proclamations. I felt quite envious of him. The whole story about this is described in my book *My Universities*.

It was in the town of Borisoglebsk that I met one of the last *Narodniks* and heard an appraisal of the peasants that was quite new to me. This was a provincial journalist called Manenkov-Starostin. If the old *Narodniks* had been extravagant about the muzhik, this man's attitude was quite ridiculous. He spoke of village life with such earpiercing pathos, on bended knees as it were, that listeners to his talk invariably taunted him most mercilessly. In a shrill strained voice, which screeched on hurriedly like a saw biting into gnarled wood, he would go on repeating the same old words about "truth and justice" which, he asserted, could be achieved only by the tiller of the soil in his close communion with nature. I don't exactly remember who it was, but I think it was V. Alabyshev who asked him ironically, "And will the kulak let you achieve all these truths?"

At this point a girl named Solovyova, whom I had never seen before, joined in the conversation, stating defiantly that it was high time to get rid of illusions. Just as everywhere else, there were rich and poor people in the villages and the real nature of the village kulak had not yet been made the subject of research. Perhaps in our conditions he was a progressive force because he was amassing capital and erecting factories and mills.

Her words evoked laughter at first, then a stormy discussion, but the girl proved well-read and stuck to her guns, and though Manenkov and the others shouted at her, she replied in the same fashion, standing at the wall, and holding the back of a chair as though for self-defence against the onslaught of her infuriated opponents. Her face pale and her eyes flashing, she retorted that the *Narodniks* had written about the peasants not in ink but in icon-lamp oil.

"All that is not literature but unction!" she exclaimed challengingly.

She was at least ten years the junior of the youngest of the dissidents. Of the younger people only Mazin, a sailor and, I think, a demoted warrant officer, took up the

cudgels in her defence. My impression, however, was that he did so not because she was right, but because she was good-looking.

The next day she left for Tsaritsyn, where she was arrested soon afterwards in connection with the case of the Kazan student Fedoseyev. Five years later her argument that the kulak was a progressive force was developed in detail by Zimmerman-Gvozdev, who was the first to raise the matter to an issue. In his book *Kulakdom Usury* he attempted to prove that by accumulating capital, proletarianising the villages and developing industry and trade, the kulak was a factor of economic progress. Resembling a Prussian soldier of the 1870-71, this bearded and burly man was ridiculed by the *Narodniks* just as the Solovyova girl had been. As is well known, Marxism galvanised the *Narodnik* movement to fresh activity, for coming up against resistance makes people stronger and enhances their talent. The *Iskra* had not yet flashed to life, but the friction caused by the fundamental contradictions of Russian life was growing stronger and more intense, and although attempts were still being made to prove that the basic forces capable of radically changing the course of life could be found only in the peasantry, concessions were already being made in favour of the cities and the working class, whose significance was becoming recognised.

My "views" upon the course of life took shape slowly and with difficulty; this may have been the result of my nomadic life, the wealth of impressions I had amassed, my lack of systematic education and lack of time for self-education. "Economic progress" had little interest for me and even contradicted my conception of social and cultural progress. This was of course the influence of the *Narodnik* leavening in me.

My employer Vasily Semyonov did not in any way fit into the development of social and cultural progress. None of the "masters" did. Of all the wise things I had heard or read, one wise thought, spoken by Proudhon, engraved itself very deep in my memory: "Property is robbery."

All this was clear to me, and though I was acquainted with quite a number of professional thieves, I saw that

the latter were "men of property" in far lesser degree; I saw too that the "honest" masters were making every endeavour to ceaselessly prove that Proudhon was right, and therein lay the sense of their lives.

I had already acquired a fairly satisfactory knowledge of European literature (in translations) and also of Russian literature, but much of what I had read was alien to me, though the beauty in it gave me delight. For a long time I could not make out why the student Raskolnikov had to murder the old woman and why a Frenchman, "disciple" of Paul Bourget, imitated the Russian student's deed. Then why was it that in the novel *Le Sens de la vie* by Edouard Rod a young man who was unable to ascertain that sense was put on the right track by an old woman, and entered the fold of the church? All the books I had read seemed to have merged into one unending and tremendous book whose basic theme was young people's searchings after the sense of life or rather their place in life. There was much I did not understand, but still in the depictions of life they presented I discerned both similarities and differences between Russian and foreign literature, similarities and differences that were not to the advantage of Russian life or flattering to it.

What I was seeking in literature was, first and foremost, a "hero", a "strong" and "critically-minded personality", but I came up against figures like Oblomov, Rudin and their like. His face contorted in malicious mockery, Cherevanin, the solitary hero created by Pomyalovsky, followed a path of his own. Though born in the same year as Bazarov, this was far more "complete" a nihilist than Turgenev's hero.

It was difficult to understand why writers depicted intellectuals as men without will or character, though hundreds of intellectuals "went to the people", many of them ending up in prison or exile. Why was it that literature failed to "reflect" such as were brought up for trial in the "case of the 193",* conducted propaganda at the factories, and worked in the *Narodnaya Volya* movement?

* *The case of the 193*—the trial of 193 *Narodnik* propagandists held between October 1877 and January 1878 and ending in many of the accused being sentenced to convict labour in Siberia.—*Ed.*

Could people such as these be denied strength of will or character? The impression was created that literature was disparaging life and presenting it in drab colours. I still remember several stories referring to that time, cheerless things full of ironical contrition. Here are some of them: *Hamlets—Two a Penny* (I forget the author's name), which was published in one of L. Obolensky's magazines; *The Hamlet of Shchigrovsky District* and *Episode from the Life of One Neither Peacock nor Sparrow*. Pyotr Boborykin published a story entitled *The Eye-Opener*, but in those days it was not the thing to give credence to Boborykin. For my part I did believe him, finding his books full of material about everyday life. I also recall two stories by V. V. Bervi-Flerovsky—*Galatov* and *Stesha's Philosophy*. I knew the author personally, and it was distressing to think that such insipid and artificial writing should have come from this tall, severe, intolerant and ever-dissenting old man, who had written *ABC of the Social Sciences* and the first Russian book on the "condition of the working class". I saw dozens of vivid and highly gifted personalities in the life about me, but these people were not reflected in literature—that "mirror of life"—or if they were reflected it was in so dim a fashion that I failed to discern them. However, in the writings of Leskov, that indefatigable seeker after originality of character, such people were to be met, though, in my opinion, they were not arrayed as they should have been. Together with admiration of the beauty that image and style presented, I was becoming ever more alarmed by a vague distrust of literature.

Again and very attentively I went through the whole literature of the sixties and seventies, which seemed to fall into two groups. The first of these contained the embittered and crude "naturalist" Nikolai Uspensky, the gloomy Reshetnikov, whose books I simply "could not tolerate"; Levitov's *Morals of Moscow's Back-Alleys* and such of his stories in which he does not overdo his alcoholic and verbose lyricism; Voronov, Naumov, Nefedov and the cautious and modest sceptic Sleptsov. This group was headed by the gifted and severe realist Pomyalovsky with his book on seminary life, a *milieu*

that produced so many men of science and letters. Indeed, it was after leaving the seminary that Pomyalovsky wrote *Philistine Happiness*, a story whose significance has not yet been sufficiently appreciated.

The second group was made up of the following: Zlatovratsky the "sweet singer", as he was called by Orlov, one of Nechayev's adherents; the early Karonin-Petropavlovsky; the doleful Zasodimsky; Bazhin, Mikhail Mikhailov, Mamin-Sibiriyak, and even G. Danilevsky, author of several poor novels, to say nothing of a number of other writers whose names have been forgotten by many others besides myself.

For me at least, this group was pre-eminently headed by Gleb Uspensky, a writer who seemed to have been the first of these to enter literature; it seemed, moreover, that all the others had either sprung from him or were following him, speaking in his voice, only in tones less fervent and impassioned, lower in key. However that might be, they all spoke the selfsame "supreme truth" that brought Uspensky to madness.

This was a writer whom I read in a way that others said they read Dostoyevsky, with amazement and irritation, and a feeling of simultaneous attraction and revulsion. I could not believe in the "supreme truth" taught by Uspensky, but his scathing wrath and his abhorrence of "universal evil" affected me in the same way as reading Dostoyevsky makes one so keenly aware of his quaking fear of the dark depths of his own "soul". I agreed with Gleb Uspensky in some things, but there were others I could not agree with: these were expressed in his hysterical outpourings about the need to "merge into the conditions of peasant life", and find a place therein. I was not in the least intimidated by the menace he expressed as follows: "The intellectual's plight will be a bitter one if sixty millions will suddenly arise at the sweep of a wand and arrange their affairs in their own fashion."

It was only too obvious that all this was unrealistic thinking; I knew that the countryside was falling into decay, with the kulaks flourishing and waxing strong, multiplying evil and producing louts and lubbers. I could

find no place for myself "in peasant life", and school inspector Malinovsky had flatly told me that "for reasons beyond his control" I would not be allowed to take my examinations.

In an attempt to provide me with a lable as a writer, critics have named a number of influences that have affected me, beginning with the *Decameron* and Nietzsche and ending in I do not remember whom. I will merely permit myself the remark that Pomyalovsky and his Cherevanin were already dead before Nietzsche began to philosophise. It is my opinion that three writers had an influence on my attitude towards life, each in his own fashion. These were Pomyalovsky, Gleb Uspensky and Leskov.

It is possible that Pomyalovsky's "influence" was stronger than that of the other two. He was the first to rebel against the old, aristocratic hierarchy and beliefs in the realm of literature, the first to tell writers in unequivocal terms of the need to "study all participants of life"—beggars, firemen, shopkeepers, tramps and the like.

The sieve of philistine life bolts bran far less regularly than it rejects outstanding people; what was required was a diligent study of the causes of the "declassing" process, since these causes testify more eloquently than anything else to the abnormal blood circulation in the body of philistine society, to the chronic diseases racking it. I think that it was due to the influence of these three writers that I made up my mind to learn at first hand how "the people" were living.

What I saw was unbridled chaos, the boiling and seething of countless and absolutely irreconcilable contradictions, both great and small, whose mass created a monstrous tragicomedy, where the leading part was played by the man of property's greed.

I mean what I have said: the word should indeed read "tragicomedy". Tragedy would be too lofty a term for a world in which all "sufferings" arise in a struggle for proprietorship of man and things, and, under the slogan of the "fight for freedom", a struggle is often waged for the extension of the "right" to exploit the labour of

others. Even when he is a "covetous knight", the philistine is never a tragic figure, since a lust for money and gold is a ridiculous and unlovely quality. In general, the old philistine world contains as much of the ridiculous as it does of the gloomy. Gogol's Plyushkin and Balzac's *père Grandet* are in no wise tragic, but merely repulsive. I do not see in what way Plyushkin differs from money-crazed millionaire-philistines, unless it is the amount of evil the latter do. Tragedy is quite incompatible with the vulgarity, inevitably inherent in petty, philistine dramas, which soil and sully life. A scuffle among monkeys at a zoo cannot be tragedy. We are only now entering into an epoch of genuine, most profound and unexampled tragedies, composed not by the Aeschyluses, Sophocles, Euripides and Shakespeares, but by the new heroes of history—the workers of all lands in the person of their vanguard, the working class of the Soviet Union, the proletariat, which has developed to a consciousness that the basic cause of all evil and sorrow in life—private property—must be destroyed and that the burdensome and shameful shackles of capitalism must be broken asunder.

I have, of course, somewhat "run ahead" of the actual order of events: though it was as far back as my youth that I conceived a hatred of the dramas and sufferings of the philistine world, this sentiment took shape much later, and very slowly because of my distrust of words. I had seen too vast a number of people whose words did not coincide with their deeds. At the time I am referring to my "impressions of life" were in a chaotic state that tormented me, but I was nevertheless in no hurry to pack them in the old kit-bag of some dogma or another. The need to develop the contradictions of life to their logical conclusion was spoken of very vaguely in those days. The words of Lenin did not attract me then or help me to find my inner bearings; I began to understand Lenin after I had made his acquaintance and heard him speak at the London Congress.* During the preceding decade I had been busy getting "to know myself", a difficult

* The Fifth Congress of the R.S.D.L.P.—*Ed.*

matter, I would like to say, for a *déclassé* such as I was then.

At that time the "teachers of life" advocated "learning from capitalism", but I considered my "learning" fully ample. The truth was twisted about in such a manner that, for instance, it was asserted that the usurer-kulak was an economically progressive factor. A brochure written by Lev Tikhomirov, former member of the Executive Committee of the routed and destroyed terrorist party, told the reader why the author "had stopped being a revolutionary".

I saw quite a number of people who "had stopped being revolutionaries"; they evoked no liking and had something in common with declassified elements of various classes and occupations.

During the preceding three or four years I had had several of my stories published in newspapers, these often winning me praise, which, however, left me cold. I did not consider myself a professional writer.

An assiduous and attentive reader, I listened and scrutinised the book-readers I lived amongst, in an attempt to find out what it was that they sought in books, and what they expected to find there first and foremost. This was no simple matter, because "tastes" changed rapidly and each reader had his own appraisal of each book's significance. A short while ago something transpired that showed me that I had begun studying the reader's tastes as far back as my Kazan days: a note-book containing notes made forty years ago was recently sent to me by an acquaintance of mine, formerly a student at the Academy of Theology, with the kindly intention of revealing the scanty literacy I possessed in those early days. He achieved his purpose, for the twenty-three time-discoloured pages covered with my handwriting and interlarded with "critical" remarks pertinently directed against me and also, this time not quite pertinently, against certain young Soviet writers, do indeed show that at the age of eighteen or twenty I probably wielded an axe with far greater skill than the pen. The note-book presents little interest, as it is full of quotations from various books, clumsy attempts at writing poetry, and a

prose description of daybreak at the confluence of the Kazanka River and the Volga. However, among all this fiddle-faddle there is a description of a lecture or talk given by a certain Anatoly Kremnyov, a man who studied Shakespeare, commented Shakespeare, acted Shakespeare on the stage, and lectured on Shakespeare and on art in general. This Kremnyov was "an agile little man, somewhat of a dandy, with a voice as clear as a bell, given to bobbing up and down and waving his hands without any cause", as I wrote in my note-book in ink over my previous pencilled remarks. Then I wrote: "Does not like Chernyshevsky, or Tolstoi, or Uspensky. Thinks that intellectuals are in no way indebted to the people; the head has no debt to pay to the hands; hands and feet must serve the head—such is the law of nature. Literature exists to enable the soul to relax; so do music and art. There is beauty in ugliness—all poppycock. The writer distinguishes neither sinners nor the righteous. The poor are rich, and the rich are poor. Among the poor are Alexei, man of God; the saints and Ivan the Simple. The rich are 'dead souls'. Literature lives a life of its own, independently, reflecting everything as it really is, not in the way Chernyshevsky does in his *Aesthetic Relations*. I don't understand how it should. Was listened to in silence as though he were a priest giving a sermon."

The only worthwhile words in this gawky account are: "was listened to in silence." From the late eighties till the early nineties I too "listened in silence" to all arguments concerning literature. That does not mean that they did not agitate me, for a writer cannot but be tormented by questions such as: What is literature? What is it for? Does it exist of and for itself? However, I had already seen that nothing in the world exists of and for itself, and that everything exists with some purpose and, in one way or another, is dependent, linked up or mixed with something else.

"Enable the soul to relax?" It would be very hard to imagine a creature whose "soul" would find relaxation while reading *Prometheus*, *Hamlet*, *Don Quixote*, *Faust*, and the works of Balzac and Dickens, Tolstoi and Stendhal, as well as Dostoyevsky, Uspensky and Chekhov—in

general, books that are in effect concentrated thoughts, emotions and blood, and display this world's bitter and burning tears, all these compressed with consummate craftsmanship into words and images. "The mirror of life?" Mirrors are things kept in houses to enable people to comb their hair to suit their faces, scrutinise pimples or wrinkles on noses or cheeks, or preen themselves. As I saw it, any passive role was unworthy of literature; I knew that, in the words of the Russian saying, "It's no use blaming the mirror if your face is ugly", but I was also beginning to realise that "faces were ugly" not because they wished to be so, but because a certain force was operating in life that was disfiguring everybody and everything, and it was that force that ought to be "reflected", not that which it disfigured. But how was this to be done, without displaying the ugly or discovering such as were handsome?

I produced quite a number of varied and ebullient pieces of writing, like *The Reader*, *About a Writer Who Got Puffed Up*, *About a Finch Who Told Fibs*, and *About The Devil*; I wrote a good deal, but there was more that I simply tore up or threw into the fire. Well, ultimately I found a path of my own.

Young people who have begun to write often complain to me in their letters that "there is no time for creative work", and "life is hard".

I must confess that such complaints do not evoke any sympathy in me, while the term "creative work" makes me smile; it is too high-flown, and seems rather out of place in our stern and strenuous times, in the presence of a working class which, straining every nerve and making no complaint, is creating something immeasurably vaster and of greater importance to mankind than any poem or story, even if the latter displays talent.

Life at a "construction job" is hard, of course: the work of destroying and creating goes on simultaneously; there is hubbub on every side; the foul and wretched rubble of the outworn past lies underfoot, filling the air with its pestilential dust. All around is in a state of

fabulously rapid change, so that there is no time to concentrate on discovering just the right resonant word or a precise and vivid image, no time to scratch one's head, mop the sweat off one's forehead, or pick one's nose, in the search after some sonorous and lilting rhythm.

All that is true, but one must remember too that a mere thirteen years ago life was incomparably harder for young people, while thirty or forty years back it was quite intolerable.

That of course is no consolation, but I have no intention of consoling those who are distressed at the "discomfort" and bustle of socialist construction. I have been asked about the way young people lived in the past, and I reply: I will tell everything that I know, in the confidence that a good knowledge of the past will be of great use to young people of today.

I began life at a time when the world of philistinism was lusty and hale, battenning on the blood of the "liberated" peasantry, which in its turn helped to swell the ranks of the philistine host. The bloated philistines kept their young people steeped in the quagmire of "tradition", of age-old prejudices, preconceptions and superstitions. The double-headed eagle of the autocracy was not only the state emblem, but a most lively and vicious bird into the bargain. God, too, was alive in the person of an impressive host of priests; there were towns in which the inhabitants maintained a dozen churches, a couple of monasteries—and only two schools. The schools were intimately bound up with the church, so that the state-paid teacher was as much a "guardian of tradition" for the philistines as the priest was. A sharp eye was kept to prevent physics, chemistry and the natural sciences from clashing with religious teaching and the Bible, and to prevent reason from contradicting faith grounded in "the fear of the Lord". People's minds were dimmed and obscured by the church's rites and activities. Its holidays and processions, its "miracle-working" icons, christenings, weddings and funerals, everything done by the church to influence people's imagination and intoxicate their reason—all these played far more important a part than is today realised in extinguishing the

mind and combating critical thought. Even if he is a philistine to the core, man is susceptible to beauty; a thirst after beauty is a healthy feeling, at the bottom of which lies a biological urge towards perfection of form. In the past, as today, the church provided beauty, but a beauty whose banefulness was cleverly disguised with the aid of excellent music, paintings and the glittering lustre of gold—the philistines loved to see their god against a background of opulence. Not only was literature incapable of actively and critically reflecting the pernicious and conservative influence of the church, but it had no desire to do so; certain writers depicted the church's work in attractive colours. Engaged in the main in describing life in St. Petersburg and Moscow, on noblemen's estates or in the villages, literature paid no heed to the way of life of the petty bourgeoisie and the town-dwellers, i.e., the vast majority of provincials, and it was in the provinces, in all sorts of out-of-the-way places, that the most horrible dramas of "fathers and sons" were enacted.

For the space of at least twenty years I observed barbarous dramas of enmity between "fathers" and "sons", not the kind of "ideological" hostility so beautifully described by Turgenev, but a feral day-by-day enmity felt by a man of property towards his own son. As soon as a youth of that period displayed any serious interest in problems of life or any natural tendency to be critical of his oppressive and ignorant environment, the vigilant fathers created an atmosphere of hostility around the "critically-minded personality", suspicions arose about a "betrayal of time-established custom", all this being followed by "instruction in the truth" with the aid of the fist, the rod, the whip, or the birch. This "instruction" ended, as a rule, in the victim being "returned to the starting point", i.e., in the fathers imparting their own philistine "likeness" to their sons. If the young critic proved stiff-necked, he was banished from his home, so that he rarely found time or place to further develop his criticism of his environment, and lacked the defender he would have had today in the person of the working class.

Few and far between were the individuals that went on pursuing the path of criticism; it is well known that the revolutionary movement was rarely joined by deserters from provincial philistine families. Most of these became thieves or tramps, and with all of them philistine individualism, stiffened by beatings and whippings, assumed a ferocious character. The most gifted among them displayed an unbridled and even morbid striving towards despotism, to cynical ill-treatment of those who were weaker than they.

I will illustrate this statement. In 1893 a certain Dyomka Mayorov terrorised the Pechersky District of Nizhni-Novgorod, his malicious, cynical and inventive hooliganism evoking fear in women and respectful envy in the youth of the district. He was a vigorous and even handsome man of about thirty, with a red beard and wavy hair, not tall, but spare of figure and very strong. He looked upon the world through screwed-up eyes, breathing hard through his nose, which was broken and cockily turned up, with the nostrils always dilated like an ill-tempered dog's. He spoke with a nasal twang, but when he was angry his voice became loud and clear. A pupil in the fifth class of the Gymnasium, he had asked the priest who taught religious knowledge some awkward question, which had led to his being expelled. His father, a master-joiner, had invited friends and relatives to his workshop to witness the ceremony, tied his son to a working bench and flogged him till he had lost consciousness. During the flogging, Dyomka had contracted pneumonia and, on recovering at hospital, had run away, reached the town of Kostroma as a stowaway on a river steamer, and been caught stealing bread, and sent home by the police. His father had broken his nose and two of his ribs, after which the boy had made another getaway, worked all summer as oiler on a steamer, spent the winter at pilfering and cheating at cards, and had relaxed in prison. In this fashion he had spent ten years of his life.

"What did you ask the priest?" I inquired.

"I don't remember, chum, I was a frisky lad and a favourite with the teachers, so I got stuck-up. I had a pal

who studied at a seminary. He didn't believe in God, so I suppose I must have asked the priest something I had learnt from him. I don't remember a thing I learnt at school—it's all clean forgotten."

Both statements were true—he had attended school and then lost all his schooling. However, he had a clear recollection of how he had been flogged.

"There was a frost on that Sunday. I lay there clenching my teeth so as not to start hollering, and I could see the blood spattering on to the snow, turning it red. Yes, I ran into a spot of trouble that day. . . ."

I met dozens of people like Dyomka Mayorov, but their number must have run into thousands—the prisons were filled in the main with the "erring offspring" of the petty bourgeoisie. These people's intense individualism, which had been knocked into them by their fathers' ill-treatment, was fully justified by all the unsavoury circumstances of the existence they had been bred in, like that of rats. I am quite sure that socially valuable forces ran senselessly to waste in the person of these young people.

Lives of far more value than Dyomka's went to rack and ruin: Pomyalovsky, Kushchevsky, Levitov, Voronov and many others were typical of lives of blighted promise.

The so-called *raznochinets* writers were also "banished" or "erring sons", the story of whose lives makes a kind of martyrology: during his schooldays at the seminary Pomyalovsky was flogged no fewer than four hundred times; Levitov was given the birch in the presence of all his class-mates. He told Karonin that "his soul had been flogged out of his body" and, he felt, what was within him was another man's "shrivelled soul". Kushchevsky wrote a story about a writer whose father sent him to the capital "to make money", in the way landowners hired out their serfs. If the son failed to send him money, the father would have him return home to be flogged. Kushchevsky himself had to work as a longshoreman. Once he fell into the Neva and caught a chill, which landed him in hospital, where he wrote his novel *Nikolai Negorev, or the Prosperous Russian*,

working at night to the light of bits of candle he had exchanged for his food. Later he took to drink and died before he was thirty. Reshetnikov was sent to prison at the age of fourteen, did two years, and was then exiled to Solikamsky Monastery for three months. He was twenty-nine when he died.

Reaching the age of forty was a rare occurrence with *raznochinets* writers, almost all of whom lived lives of hunger and privation. They had few readers, and most of these were alien to the authors.

"To the mass of the people," Dobrolyubov wrote sadly but with truth, "our interests are alien, our sufferings incomprehensible, and our rapture amusing. We work and write in the interests of what is merely a circle, be it larger or smaller." The bitter truth of these words was felt in greater or lesser degree by all *raznochinets* writers.

Those who are today engaged in writing cannot complain that they are working for strangers. They can say that "our interests are alien to the mass of the people" only if they—these writers—do not understand and are not carried away by the revolutionary aims and tasks of the masses. Translated into reality by the heroic labour of the working class, these aims and purposes have invested life with the character of seething and ceaseless creativity and have created and brought forward an infinite number of new facts and new themes.

At last new men have come to birth
With new ideas and emotions
To set astir the stagnant earth.

Forty years ago young people lived within the narrow confines of age-old routine "established by the Almighty" and jealously and zealously guarded by their fathers, whose aspirations, from the cradle to the grave, were spurred on by the lusts of the flesh. These urges had to be satisfied in full, even to satiety, and, moreover, they wanted an assured "other life" after death. Circumscribed by the narrow confines of his own interests, the philistine could hear, amid his cautious enjoyments, the hissing of a little and dark horror at the prospect of his flesh ultimately being food for worms.

While it does not disturb his life, this mean and vulgar horror helps the philistine convince himself of his imaginary isolation from others and consequently feel no responsibility towards them, for "all are equal in the presence of death, each man being responsible to his Maker for himself alone". Besides, "man is the alpha and omega of life", and so on and so forth. It is to such formulas that the paltry meaning of the philosophy of philistine individualism boils down to, no matter what involved wording it may disguise itself in.

"Individuality strives to extricate itself from the vice-like grip of society," said N. Mikhailovsky, who arrayed the *Narodniks'* ideas and moods into a system of moral philosophy. His writings—I think it was in an article entitled "The Struggle for Individuality"—contained the following sentence: "If I contrast myself to the world about me, I stand opposed to the hostile forces lurking in this world. I have declared war on these forces, and I wish to force them to serve me," i.e., the individual.

Since it is the man of property, the capitalist and master of life, that is the principal "hostile force in the world", it follows that he alone has the power to make everybody and everything serve him and his ends. It is therefore quite natural that in the long run the self-sufficient individual kneels willingly to "the hostile force in the world", or, as in the writings of Artsibashev and Leonid Andreyev, falls into pessimism and self-negation. "Life is of no interest," he calls out, "mankind is obtuse and man is contemptible." This cry is repeated in ever louder tones each time the philistine, after drawing courage from books, reluctantly pokes his nose into the revolution in the hope of achieving personal success and a good "place in life". Rebuffed by capitalism, which holds a monopoly of posts that wield authority, the philistine is sucked into the slough of despond and bitterness and starts whining about his delusions, errors and sufferings. This happened after the *Zemlya i Volya* (Land and Freedom) Party was smashed; similar wails and bitterness found a vent after 1905-06, and the same kind of philistine plaint is being repeated today, following the

collapse of philistine hopes of the restoration of the capitalist system in the Soviet Union.

What came in the eighties from the pens of the Nezlobins, Suvorins, Burenins, Dedlovs, Menshikovs and other runts and manikins, was reiterated by the Struves and the Berdyayevs in 1908, with its philosophy refurbished; today these wails are being repeated by the Dans, the Kerenskys and other soloists of revolution, to the accompaniment of a small chorus of voluntary *émigrés*, which includes quite a number of "grafters", a chorus of yelping lap-dogs of revolution which but recently stood obsequiously on their hind paws before the working class.

To my way of thinking, the smooth, severe or florid utterances made by experts in petty-bourgeois philosophy, these impotent lovers of "the truth", present less interest than the somewhat crude words and complaints of rank-and-file philistines, which are truer to life and are a simpler and more faithful reflection of the mentality of these *ci-devants*. Here, for instance, is an extract from *Confession of One Who Does Not Know How to Live*, published in 1911 and written by a certain F. Witberg:

I look upon everything with negation. However, it is not ideals that I deny, but the forms of life, since all of these seem false to me. I have a distaste of life. I cannot deceive myself with surviving forms, which are unmeaning, but I lack the boldness and confidence required to reject these forms and deny them publicly. I lack these qualities because I am profoundly convinced that substance cannot be embodied in any kind of form, be it religion, poetry, science or practice, since any form means restriction, while substance is limitless by its very nature. So what difference will it make what kind of forms will exist?

All this, it will be seen, is not very literate; it is flat and vulgar. Why should it be quoted? Twenty years have elapsed since this book appeared, and what years! However, the philistine has descendants among our youth, as will be seen from what one of these wrote to me in 1930:

Although this is just as hackneyed as the daily sunrise, I want to ask you: what is the sense of life? Does it consist in being of use to "all", in a completely collective life, in sacrificing one's interests to the welfare of society? Is not that a little too "platonic"? Frankly speaking, do such people exist in general? Are they pos-

sible? Yes, that is some philosophy! Is life worth while, in that case? I think it is not. But then, you haven't got the guts to die before your time. You can't die! What a blind alley!

The author goes on to say:

I like to criticise others and make fun of them, but each jibe against me rankles in my memory for a long time.

Witberg and this lad speak the same kind of language. If the latter were an exception, there would be no reason to pay the least attention to him. The trouble is that there are quite a number of such "free-thinking" whelps in our land; these are not merely "dimwits from the class angle", as a good-natured worker I know has dubbed people of this type; no, with them something has gone wrong with the organ that takes in impressions of the surrounding world. All of them complain in various ways of one and the same thing—"the impossibility for man to develop as a harmonious personality in the given conditions".

"Harmonious personality" has been the age-old dream of hundreds of writers and philosophers, but Don Quixote, the most honest and noble figure ever created, proved a laughing-stock.

What can Don Quixote do to liberate hundreds of millions of people from the captivity of property relations and the yoke of capitalism?

We are living in an epoch in which the proletariat is acquiring harmonious personality, a kind that enjoys actual, decisive and complete freedom of thought. It is only the proletariat that is capable of subduing the "hostile force in the world", and, after victory has been won, the proletariat alone will create all the conditions required for the free development of harmonious personality.

1930-31

VLADIMIR
MAYAKOVSKY



HOW ARE VERSES TO BE MADE?

I

I feel I must write on this subject.

In various literary arguments, in conversations with young members of the various word-manufacturing corporations (RAPP, TRAP, PAP, etc.), and in dealing with the critics, I have often had occasion, if not actually to smash up, at least to cast a slur on the old prosody. The old and entirely blameless poetry has, of course, hardly been touched; it only came into the picture when the ardent apologists of antiquity took refuge from the new art behind the backsides of historic monuments.

And yet it's by toppling these monuments over, smashing them up, and rolling the pieces away, that we have been able to show the Great Ones to the reader from an entirely unfamiliar and unstudied angle.

Children, and young literary schools, too, are always curious to know what's inside the papier-mâché horse. After the work of the formalists, the innards of the paper gee-gees

and elephants are plain to see. If the horses have been slightly bent in the process—so sorry! We shouldn't quarrel with the poetry of the past: it's our textbook material.

Our abiding and principal hatred is directed against the philistines with their sentimentalised approach to poetry. Against those who see all the greatness of the old poetry in the fact that they loved the way Onegin loved Tatyana (souls in harmony!), that they understood the poets (as taught in high school!), that iambics fall caressingly on the ear. We loathe this elementary stamp-and-whistle dance, because it surrounds the difficult and serious business of poetry with an atmosphere of sexual *frissons* and thrills, with the belief that only eternal poetry is safe from molestation by dialectics, and that the only method of production is to gaze skywards in search of inspiration while waiting for the celestial spirit of poesy to descend on the bald patch in the guise of a dove, a peacock, or an ostrich.

These gentlemen are easily shown up.

Just try comparing Tatyana's love and "the gentle science Nazon sang" with a draft of the marriage laws, or reading about Pushkin's "disenchanted lorgnette" to an audience of Donets miners, or running ahead of a First of May procession while reciting the opening lines of Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*.

After this kind of experience, the young poet burning with zeal to devote himself to the revolution is hardly likely to be interested in the old-fashioned approach to the craft of verse composition.

A great deal has been said and written about this. The uproarious approval of the auditorium has always been on our side. But after the uproar, voices are raised in scepticism.

"You only destroy and you create *nothing*! The old textbooks are no good, but where are the new ones? Give us the *rules* of your prosody! Give us textbooks!"

The reference to the fact that the old prosody has been in existence for fifteen hundred years while ours has only been going for thirty impresses no one.

You want to write poetry and you want to know how it's done. How is it that a piece can be written in strict

accordance with the rules of Shengeli, fully rhymed, and scanning in iambs and trochaics and yet not be accepted as poetry? You are entitled to demand that the poet should not take the secrets of his craft with him to the grave.

I want to write about my work as a practitioner, not as formulator of rules and regulations. This article of mine is of no scientific significance whatever. I am writing about my own work which I am convinced, from my own observation, differs little in essence from the work of other professional poets.

Once again, I must make one firm reservation. I'm not going to give *rules* by which a man can become a poet and write verse. In general, there are no such rules. A man is called a poet precisely because he creates these same poetic rules.

For the hundredth time, I will quote by way of example an overworked old analogy of mine.

A mathematician is a man who creates and adds something to the rules of mathematics, a man who contributes something new to mathematical knowledge. The man who first formulated "twice two makes four" was a great mathematician, even if he only arrived at this truth by adding two cigarette-ends to two more cigarette-ends. None of those who followed him, even though they may have added up immeasurably bigger objects such as, say, railway engines—none of these are mathematicians. In maintaining this, I would in no way belittle the work of the man who adds up railway engines. In times of transport chaos, his work can be a hundred times more valuable than the stark arithmetical truth. On the other hand, there is no need to submit railway engine overhaul statistics to a mathematical society and insist on them being studied side by side with Lobachevsky's geometry. This can only drive the planning commission frantic, bewilder the mathematicians, and lead the valuers up a blind alley.

I'll be told I'm preaching to the converted and that it's all obvious anyway. Nothing of the kind.

Eighty per cent of all the rhymed rubbish printed is published simply because the editors either have no conception of the poetry that preceded, or because they don't know what poetry is all about.

Editors can only say "I like" or "I don't like", forgetting that taste also can and must be cultivated. Nearly all the editors of my acquaintance have complained to me that they don't know how to reject poetry manuscripts, that they don't know what to say in the circumstances.

The educated editor should tell the poet: "Your verse is very correct, it's been written in conformity with the third edition of *The Guide to Versification* by M. Brodovskiy (Shengeli, Grech, etc.); all your rhymes are safe rhymes, long available in the N. Abramov *Comprehensive Russian Rhyming Dictionary*. Since I have no good new poetry to hand, I shall be pleased to accept yours and pay you top copy-typing rates, three rubles per sheet subject to submission in triplicate."

The poet won't have a leg to stand on. The poet will either give up writing altogether or treat poetry as a job demanding a great deal more hard work. Either way, the poet will stop putting on airs in front of the working reporter, who gets three rubles a write-up for what is at least up-to-date news. After all, the reporter busts his breeches over street brawls and fires, whilst our poet only wears himself to a frazzle looking things up in books.

If poetry is to obtain higher qualifications, if it is to flourish in the future, we must give up isolating it from all the other aspects of human toil as light work.

One reservation: making rules is not in itself the purpose of poetry, otherwise the poet degenerates into a pedant, practising how to formulate precepts for non-existent or unnecessary objects and situations. For instance, it would be pointless to invent rules for counting the stars while riding a bicycle at full speed.

Situations demanding formulae, or *rules*, are created by life. The means of formulation and the purpose of the rules are determined by the exigencies of the class struggle.

For example: the revolution cast the rugged idiom of the millions out on to the streets; the slang of the outer suburbs flowed across the avenues in the city centre; the enervated burbling of the intelligentsia with their vocabulary of castrated words like "ideal", "fair principles", "the divine origin", "the transcendental countenance of Christ and Antichrist"—all this kind of talk, once

mouthed in the restaurants, has been wiped out. A new element of language has been liberated. How is it to be made poetical? The old rules with their "moons" and "Junes" and Alexandrines are useless. How is popular speech to be introduced into poetry, and how is poetry to be extracted from popular speech?

By ignoring the revolution in the name of the iamb?

We have turned spiteful and obsequious:

There's no way out.

Black-handed Vikzhel's* routes are devious

And all about.

(*Z. Hippus*)

No!

It's equally hopeless to try and catch the ear-splitting roar of the revolution in four-stanza amphibrachs meant to be recited in a tiny whisper!

Sea-wanderers, nomads, pilgrims of the ocean,

The guests of the thunder, swift albatross birds,

Seafarers, akin to the eagle in motion,

Young song be of fire and of ruby-red words.

(*Kirillov*)

No!

Give the new language full rights of citizenship at once: the shout instead of the lilt, the thunder of the drum instead of the lullaby:

Keep in step with the revolution!

(*Blok*)

On the march, about turn!

(*Mayakovsky*)

But it isn't enough to give samples of the new verse or rules for using the power of words on the revolutionary masses. This power must be carefully calculated so as to render the maximum possible assistance to one's own class.

It isn't enough to say, "Enemy watching! Proceed with caution!" (*Blok*.) The enemy must be described in detail, or at least there must be a reasonable indication of what he looks like.

* *Vikzhel*—an acronym for the short-lived All-Russian Executive Railway Union Committee. (August-December, 1917).—*Ed.*

It isn't enough to execute an about turn on the march. The drill must be carried out strictly according to the rules of street fighting, with the telegraph, the bank, and the armouries being seized and handed over to the workers in revolt.

Hence:

Eat your pineapples,
Gobble your grouse,
It's nearly all up with you, bourgeois louse! . . .

(Mayakovsky)

Classical poetry would hardly acknowledge this sort of thing as legitimate verse. In 1820, Grech didn't know anything about *chastushki*, but even if he had, he would probably have dismissed them with the same condescension as he did the popular verse form: "These verses follow neither metrical pattern nor rhyme scheme."

And yet this form was taken up in the streets of St. Petersburg. Critics may speculate at their leisure on the rules according to which it happened.

In verse composition, innovation is obligatory. The material of words and of verbal combinations as they occur to the poet must be processed. If old verbal scrap has gone into the making of verse, it must be strictly in proportion to the amount of new material. Whether or not the resulting alloy will stand up to the test of usage depends on the quantity and quality of the added material.

Innovation does not, of course, mean the constant uttering of unprecedented truths. Iambics, free verse, alliteration and assonance cannot be invented every day of the week. But one can work on their further development, application, and dissemination.

"Twice two is four" does not and cannot exist in its own right. One must be able to put it into practice (rules of application). One must make this truth memorable (more rules). One must demonstrate its validity under various actual circumstances (example, content, theme).

It clearly follows from this that it is not enough for poetry to describe or reflect reality. This is a necessary function, but it should be rated as equivalent to the work of a secretary at a big meeting. It can be no more than

"heard—resolution adopted". This is the tragedy of the fellow-travellers. They heard five years after the event and made their decisions too late, when the others had already done the job.

Poetry is initially tendentious.

To my mind, when the poet says "All alone I walk along the highroad", he is agitating for girls to go out with poets. After all, you get lonely on your own. How about a poem with the same force in favour of forming co-ops!

The old guides to versification were certainly not guides in the strict sense of the word. They merely described historical methods of composition which had become common practice. The correct title for these books would not be *How to Write*, but *How They Used to Write*.

I'll be honest with you. I don't know anything about iambs or trochaics, I could never tell which was which, and I don't intend to start learning now. Not because they're difficult, but because throughout the whole of my work as a poet, I've never had any occasion to bother with such things. If fragments of these metres have occurred, then they simply happened, since these tedious motifs keep turning up only too often—for example, "Down Along Old Mother Volga".

I've begun studying them many times, understood the mechanics, and then forgotten them again. Less than three per cent of my practical work is spent on these matters, which take up 90% of the space in the poetry textbooks.

In poetic composition, there are only a few general rules for beginning poetic composition. And even these rules are purely conventional. As in chess. The first moves are almost standard. But after they've been made, you begin thinking out a new attack. Even the most inspired move can't be repeated in the given situation in the next game. Only the surprise move will catch your opponent napping.

Just like surprise rhymes in verse.

What are the essentials for beginning the composition of poetry?

First. The existence in society of a task which cannot possibly be tackled other than by poetic work. A social

demand. (An interesting subject for a thesis: "On the Discrepancies Between Social and Actual Demand").

Second. An accurate knowledge or, to be more precise, awareness of the desires of your class (or group you represent) concerning this problem. In other words, a target.

Third. Material. Words. Continual restocking of the reservoirs or barns of your skull with the needful, expressive, rare, invented, renewed, manufactured and all other conceivable kinds of words.

Fourth. Equipment for the enterprise, and tools of production. Pen, pencil, typewriter, telephone, a suit for visiting the doss-house, a bicycle for going to the editorial office, a suitably mounted desk-umbrella for writing in the rain, living accommodation of the requisite dimensions for pacing up and down while at work, a contact with a press-cuttings agency for tracing material on issues agitating the provinces, etc., etc., and even a pipe and cigarettes.

Fifth. Word-processing techniques and methods, infinitely individual, and only to be acquired after years of daily toil: rhymes, metres, alliterations, images, bathos, pathos, tailpieces, headings, drafts, etc., etc.

Example: social demand—song lyrics for Red Army soldiers off to the Petrograd front. Target—to smash Yudenich. Material—army slang. Tool of production—a chewed pencil-stub. Method—rhyming *chastushki*.

Result:

Had some mittens from my pretty
'Gainst a winter spell of weather
Now Yudenich leaves the city
Absolutely hell-for-leather.

The innovation in this quatrain justifying the production of the *chastushki* is in the rhyming of spell of weather with hell-for-leather. This innovation makes the verse necessary poetic, and gives it its character.

If *chastushki* is to work, it is essential to use unexpected rhymes and there must be a total discrepancy between the first couplet and the second. Moreover, the first couplet may be termed auxiliary.

Even these general basic rules of poetic composition will give better opportunities than exist at present for costing and grading poetry products.

Moments of material, equipment and form can be registered directly as costing units.

Social demand? Yes. 2 units. Target? 2 units. Rhyme? Another unit. Alliteration? Another half-unit. Plus one unit for rhythm; the unusual metre necessitated a busride.

The critics can smile if they want, but I would rate the verse of any Alaskan poet (given equal ability) higher than that of someone living in, say, Yalta. The Alaskan has to freeze and buy a fur coat, and the ink congeals in his fountain pen. But your Yalta poet lives amongst palm trees in places that are beautiful without poetry anyway.

The same precision is introduced into categorisation.

The poems of Demyan Bedny exemplify a correctly understood contemporary social demand, a definite target—the needs of the workers and peasants; words in common use amongst the semi-rural population (with an admixture of obsolescent poetic rhymes); and, in form, the fable.

The poems of Kruchenykh: alliteration, dissonance; target—to help the poets of the future.

There is no need to go into the metaphysical problem of which is better, Demyan Bedny or Kruchenykh. Theirs are poetic works from various backgrounds and on various levels. Each can exist without crowding out or competing with the other.

From my point of view, the best poetic work will be one which has been written according to the social demand of the Comintern, with the victory of the proletariat as its target; conveyed in new words, meaningful and comprehensible to all; written on a desk equipped as recommended by NOT,* and delivered to the editorial office by aeroplane. I insist, by aeroplane, since the everyday life of a poet is one of the most important factors in our production. Of course, accounting and stock-taking procedures are considerably more subtle and complex for poetry than those I have described here.

I am deliberately pointing, simplifying and caricaturing my argument. I'm pointing it in order to demonstrate more vividly that the essence of contemporary work in

* NOT—Scientific Organisation of Labour.—*Ed.*

literature does not lie in evaluation from the point of view of the taste of this or that finished article, but in a correct approach to the study of the actual production process.

The point of the present article is not to discuss ready-made models or forms, but to try and illustrate the actual poetry production process.

How, then, is verse made?

The work begins long before the social demand is received and understood.

One works on the preliminaries of poetic composition all the time.

A good piece of poetry can only be delivered on schedule, given a large reserve of preliminary poetic work pieces.

At present, for instance (I'm only writing about what has just occurred to me), I've got the name "Mister Glycerine" on the brain. It came into my head quite by chance during an unfinished conversation about glycerine.

There are good rhymes, too!

(Colours in the sky) *trembling*
(Soared the grim) *Kremlin.*
(Go Roman, go French) *go Ruthenian,*
(Give shelter to a) *Bohemian.*
(On a whinnying steed) *giddy up!*
(I'll go and look my old) *biddy up.*
(After all, it's not) *too far*
To Ufa.

Or:

(Thick colours that) *overcrust*
(The days and nights of) *August,*

etc., etc.

One American ditty I like could be changed and Russified with advantage:

Hard-hearted Hannah
The Vamp of Savannah
The Vamp of Savannah
Jee-ay.

There are some close-knit alliterations in connection with a poster I once saw bearing the name "Nita Jo":

Where is gentle Nita Jo?
Nita Jo lives just below.

Or, apropos of the Lyamina Dye Works:

She's a dyer, my mama.

My mama is Lyamina.

There are themes of varying clarity and obscurity:

1) New York in the rain.

2) A prostitute on the Boulevard des Capuchins, Paris. It is considered terribly *chic* to make love to this prostitute, since she only has one leg. The other, apparently, was amputated by a tram.

3) The old man in the cloakroom of the enormous Restaurant Hessler, Berlin.

4) The tremendous theme of October, which you'll never finish unless you go and live in the country.

I carry all these work-pieces around with me in my head, only jotting down the more difficult ones.

I don't know what I'm going to do with them but I'm sure I shall find a use for them all.

All my time goes on these work-pieces. I spend between about 10 and 18 hours on them every day, and I'm always muttering something to myself. It's this concentration that accounts for the celebrated absent-mindedness of the poet.

Toil on these work-pieces is so intensive with me that in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred I can name the place where, during fifteen years' work, the various rhymes, alliterations, images, etc., came into my head and reached their final form.

A place.

Face of a... (Tram from Sukharev Tower to Sretenka Gates, 1913.)

The dull rain squints its eyes,

I spy... (Strastnoy Monastery, 1912.)

Stroke cats black and dry. (Oak at Kuntsevo, 1914.)

Miss Lefkovich.

It's left of which? (Cabby on the Embankment, 1917.)

Son-of-a-bitch D'Anthès. (In a train near Mytishchi, 1924.)

Etc., etc.

This "notebook" is one of the most important prerequisites for making the *real* article.

The writer's notebook is not usually mentioned till after his death. It lies among his miscellaneous papers for

years and is only published posthumously, after the "finished pieces". But to the writer, this book is all that matters.

Beginners, naturally, are without such a book. They have neither the practice nor the experience. *Finished* lines are rare with them, and so the whole of the work is too long and wishy-washy.

No matter what his gifts, the beginner will not write a solid work straightway. On the other hand, the early efforts often have more "freshness", since they represent the sum total of all the work-pieces accumulated so far.

Only a store of carefully considered work-pieces makes it possible for me to be on schedule with a poem, since my present average output is 8-10 lines a day.

Every encounter, every public notice, every event, whatever the circumstances, is of value to the poet solely as material for verbal formulation.

There was a time when I became so absorbed in this work that I was actually afraid to use in front of other people words and expressions which I felt to be needed for future poems. I became morose, dull, and unsociable.

Somewhere round about 1913, I was travelling back to Moscow from Saratov and, in order to prove my integrity to a girl travelling with me in the same compartment, I told her I was "not a man, but a cloud in pants". As soon as I'd said this, I promptly conceived that it could come in useful for a poem. Was it going to be bandied about and circulated to no good purpose? Terribly upset, I spent the next half hour probing my companion with a series of leading questions and only calmed down when I finally managed to reassure myself that my words had gone in one ear and out the other.

Two years later, I needed the "cloud in pants" for the title of a long poem.

For two whole days, I pondered over the words to describe the tenderness of a lonely man for his one and only love.

How would he cherish and love her?

On the third night, I went to bed with a headache without having thought of a thing. During the night, it suddenly took shape.

Your body
I shall cherish and love
as a soldier, maimed in the wars,
unneeded, unwanted,
cherishes
his only leg.

Still half asleep, I jumped out of bed. I wrote "only leg" on a cigarette packet in the dark with a burnt matchstick and went back to bed. Next morning, I spent two hours wondering what the "only leg" was doing on the packet and how it got there.

A rhyme almost but not quite caught by the tail can poison your whole life. You talk, not knowing what you're saying; you eat, not realising what's in front of you; you can't sleep at night with the elusive rhyme flying about just beyond your range of vision.

Thanks to Shengeli's easy approach, poetic composition is now treated as a light affair. Some young men have even beaten the professor at his own game. Here, for instance, is an excerpt from the advertisement columns of the Kharkov *Proletariat* (No. 256).

"How to be a writer.

"Send stamps value 50 kop. for details to:

P.O. Box No. 11,
Slavyansk Station,
Donets Railway."

By the way, this is a pre-revolutionary effort. One magazine, *Entertainment*, issued a supplement in the form of a booklet entitled *How to Write Poetry in 5 Easy Lessons*.

I think that my own few modest examples should help to classify poetry as one of the hardest things it is possible to attempt, which, after all, is what it actually is.

The attitude to a line should be like the attitude to a woman in Pasternak's inspired quatrain:

I studied you from the top that day
Like a provincial Shakespeare tragedian immersing
Himself in his lines. Committing you to memory,
I drifted vaguely all over the city, rehearsing.

In the next chapter, I will try to explain the development of these preliminary conditions for making verse by

giving a concrete example of a poem in the actual process of composition.

2

I regard "To Sergei Yesenin" as the most effective of my latest poems.

I didn't need to look for a magazine or publisher. It was copied out before publication, secretly snatched from the printers, and put out by a provincial newspaper. It was read in public by popular demand, and during the reading you could have heard a pin drop. Afterwards, there was much shaking of paws and frenzied enthusiasm in the corridors. When it came out in print, reviews appeared the same day, simultaneously abusive and complimentary.

How was this poem worked on?

I had known Yesenin for some time—about ten or twelve years.

The first time I met him, he was wearing bast shoes and a peasant blouse embroidered in cross-stitch. And he lived in one of the best flats in Leningrad, too. Knowing that the real, as opposed to the decorative, peasant was only too glad to change his attire for a jacket and spats, I couldn't believe in Yesenin. I thought he looked stagy, like something out of a musical comedy. All the more so, since he was already writing successful poetry and could obviously have found the necessary rubles for a pair of shoes.

As one who had in his time worn and eventually discarded a yellow blouse, I enquired about his dress in a matter-of-fact sort of way:

"What's this, then? Advertising?"

Yesenin answered me in the tone of voice you might expect of animated ikon-lamp oil:

Something like:

"We be country folk, we don't understand the likes of you . . . in our own simple way . . . of the soil. . . ."

As futurists we were, of course, hostile to his very talented and very countryfied verse.

But he seemed an amusing and nice enough fellow.

On my way out, I said to him on the off-chance:

"I bet you give up all those bast shoes and folk-stitch cockerels."

Yesenin protested with the fervour of conviction. Klyuev quickly dragged him away like a mother rescuing her daughter from the danger of seduction, afraid that her little girl has neither the strength nor the desire to resist.

I only had fleeting glimpses of Yesenin after that and didn't really meet him properly until after the revolution at Gorky's place. With all my inherent tactlessness, I promptly bellowed:

"Pay up, Yesenin. You're wearing a jacket and tie!"

Yesenin turned nasty and started to pick a quarrel.

I then began to come across lines and poems of his that I couldn't help liking, such as:

Dear old, dear old silly fool . . . etc.

The sky's great bell, the clapper moon . . . etc.

Yesenin had broken free of his idealised rusticism, but not, of course, without some flops, and so alongside

My mother is my native land
And I'm a Bolshevik. . . .

came the apologia of the cow. Instead of a "memorial to Marx", there was to be a memorial to a cow. Not a milch cow à la Sosnovsky either, but a symbolic cow, a cow butting a railway engine with its horns.

I had frequent quarrels with Yesenin, attacking the imaginism that had proliferated around him.

Then Yesenin went to America, and then somewhere else, returning with a marked penchant for the new.

Unfortunately, during this period, his name cropped up in the police reports more often than under published poems. He was rapidly and unmistakably becoming a permanent entry on the poetic sick list (I refer to the minimum expected of a poet).

I met him several times, and our meetings were lyrical, without a trace of discord.

I followed his development with pleasure, from imaginism to VAPP.* He often spoke with interest of other

* VAPP—All-Union Association of Proletarian Writers.—*Ed.*

poets' work. The self-infatuated Yesenin was beginning to show a new trait: he was somewhat envious of poets who had organically identified themselves with the revolution, with the working class, and who saw a great and optimistic road lying before them.

This, in my opinion, was at the root of Yesenin's poetic nervousness and self-dissatisfaction, aggravated by wine and by the callous and tactless behaviour of his immediate circle.

Towards the end, Yesenin even showed a marked sympathy for us (of the LEF* movement). He used to visit Aseyev, ring me up, and sometimes went out of his way to meet me.

He put on weight and became somewhat flabby, but he was still the same elegant Yesenin.

My last encounter with him made a profound and tragic impression. I was in the Pay Section of the State Publishing House, when a man came rushing up to me, his face puffy and swollen, his tie twisted, his hat perched precariously on top of his matted blond hair. He and his two shady (as I thought) companions reeked of spirits. It actually cost me something of an effort to realise that this was Yesenin. With difficulty, I evaded the immediate invitation, reinforced with much brandishing of ten-ruble notes to come and have a drink. For the rest of that day I was haunted by the image of Yesenin's appalling condition and in the evening, needless to say, talked at length (unfortunately, nobody ever gets any further than talk in these cases) to my comrades about how something would have to be done about Yesenin. We all blamed "environment", and parted with the conviction that Yesenin's own friends and admirers would look after him.

We were wrong. Yesenin's end distressed us, and distressed us in a normal human way. Yet his end seemed perfectly logical and natural. I heard the news during the night, and my distress would have been no more than distress and would have abated somewhat by dawn. But the morning papers came out with the lines he wrote before his death:

* LEF—Left Front (group of writers).—Ed.

In this life, there's nothing new in dying;
Nothing new, of course, in living either.

After these lines, Yesenin's death became a literary fact.

It immediately became clear how many suffering from doubt and hesitation were going to be driven to the noose and the revolver by the mood of this powerful poetry.

And all the newspaper analyses and articles in the world would never be able to invalidate them.

Such poetry can and must be fought with poetry and *poetry alone*.

And so the poets of the USSR were faced with a social demand—to write a poem about Yesenin. An exclusive demand, important and urgent, since Yesenin's lines were already beginning to act swiftly and surely. Many took up the challenge. But what to write? And how?

Verses, articles, reminiscences, and sketches were published. Even dramas were staged. In my opinion, 90% of all that was written about Yesenin was simply rubbish or dangerous rubbish.

Minor verse by Yesenin's friends. You can always tell them from their approach to Yesenin. They treat him as one of the family—"Seryozha" (even Bezymensky borrowed this inappropriate name). As a literary fact, "Seryozha" does not exist. There is only Sergei Yesenin, poet. It is of him that we should speak. The introduction of a family endearment like "Seryozha" immediately ruins the social demand and the method of its formulation. The word "Seryozha" reduces an important and serious theme to the level of epigram or madrigal. Poetic relatives can shed as many tears as they like, but they're wasting their time. As poetry, such verse cannot make its mark. It evokes only laughter and exasperation.

The poems of Yesenin's "enemies", even though reconciled to him by his death, are church sermons. They refuse Yesenin poetic rights of burial solely because he committed suicide.

We never thought that even you could play
The hooligan to such an evil end.

(Zharov, I think)

These are the verses of poets in too much of a hurry to meet an improperly understood social demand, where the target is totally unconnected with the manner of execution and the cheap journalistic style is quite inappropriate in the tragic circumstances and, consequently, ineffective.

There is something oppressively false about a suicide, with its spontaneous and unmotivated negation (how else could it be?!), when it is dislocated from its complex social and psychological environment.

The prose written about Yesenin is also of little use in the fight against the danger of that last poem of his.

Beginning with Kogan who, in my opinion, did not learn his Marxism from Marx but tried to extract him independently from old man Luka's affirmation, "not a flea but has its merits. . . . They're all of them black, they all of them jump", considering this truth as the highest form of scientific objectivism and consequently in absentia (posthumously) writing a valedictory article needed by no one, and ending with those evil-smelling little books by Kruchenykh, who teaches Yesenin political grammar as if he, Kruchenykh, had spent all his life in gaol suffering for freedom and as if it cost him enormous effort to write those six (!) booklets about Yesenin with a hand still scarred by the clanking manacles.

What to write about Yesenin, and how?

After studying his death from all angles and leafing through material written by others, I formulated and set myself a task.

Target: deliberately to paralyse the effect of Yesenin's last verse, to make Yesenin's death uninteresting, to substitute for the easy beauty of death another kind of beauty, since toiling humanity needs all its strength for the revolution it has begun and, notwithstanding all the trials of the road, notwithstanding all the problematical contrasts of NEP*, it demands that we should celebrate the joy of life and the gaiety of that most difficult march into communism.

Now that the poem is to hand, formulation is easy; but it was very difficult at the time.

* NEP—New Economic Policy.—Ed.

The work coincided with my provincial lecture tours. For about three months I returned to the theme daily and was unable to think of anything worthwhile. Nothing came of it but blue-faced demons and water pipes. After three months, I hadn't thought of a single line. The constant sifting and resifting of words only yielded a few ready-made rhymes in the nature of "spheres—beers", "hundred—kept under". Travelling back to Moscow, I realised that the difficulty and slowness of writing arose from too great a correspondence between my own personal circumstances and what was to be described.

The same hotel rooms, the same pipes, the same enforced solitude.

Circumstances hemmed me in, giving me no outlet, none of the sensations or words necessary for pinning the thing down, for a denial; nor did they allow me the wherewithal for an appeal to the fighting spirit.

Which almost leads to a rule: a change of time or place is essential, if one is to produce a poetic article.

Exactly as in, for instance, painting: if you are sketching a subject, you should step back a distance equivalent to three times the size of that subject. Unless you do this, you simply won't be able to see what you are painting.

The greater the article or event, the greater the distance you must step back. Weak artists mark time and wait for the event to retreat into the past so that they can draw it; strong ones run ahead to get a grasp of time.

Any description of contemporary events by the protagonists in today's battles is bound to be inadequate, even incorrect and at any event lop-sided.

Obviously, such work is a sum total, the result of two kinds of work—notes by the contemporary, and the generalising work of the future artist. This is the tragedy of the revolutionary writer: he can produce a brilliant eyewitness account, such as "Week" by Libedinsky, and yet strike a hopelessly false note attempting to generalise without putting some distance between himself and the subject. If there is no actual distance in time or place, then at least an assumed one.

Consequently, to give one example, the respect afforded

to "poetry" as compared with facts and records has impelled the worker correspondents to put out an anthology entitled *Petals* with verses such as:

I'm a proletarian cannon
Firing here and there.

There is a lesson to be learnt from this: 1) stop raving about unrolling "epic canvases" while there's fighting in progress at the barricades—the whole canvas will be torn to shreds; 2) the value of factual material (whence the interest in articles by the worker and peasant correspondents) in time of revolution should be rated higher, and certainly not lower, than so-called "poetic composition". Hasty poeticising can only emasculate and mutilate its subject matter. All poetry handbooks à la Shengeli are damaging, because they do not extract poetry from the subject matter, i.e., instead of giving the essence of the facts and compressing them to achieve verbal density, tautness and economy, they simply dress up a new fact in any old form. More often than not, the form doesn't fit; or the fact vanishes completely, like a flea in a pair of trousers, e.g., Radimov's piglets in Greek pentameters more suited to an *Iliad*; or the fact bulges out of its poetic clothes and looks silly instead of imposing. A typical example is Kirillov's *Seafarers*, marching solemnly along in threadbare four-line amphibrachs about to burst at the seams.

There must be a transfer of fact to a plane other than the one on which it occurred. Distance is obligatory. This does not, of course, mean that the poet should sit on the fence and just wait. He should make time get a move on. Replace the slow march of time with a change of place; fill an actual day with a century of fantasy.

In light, minor works, such transposition can and should be made (indeed, it happens of its own accord) artificially.

It's a good thing to write a poem about May Day in November or December, when you desperately wish it was already May.

If you want to write about tender love, take the Number Seven bus from Lubyanskaya Square to Nogin Square. The revolting shake-up will drive home like nothing else

the charm of another life. The shake-up is necessary in the interest of comparison.

Something already written also needs time to mature.

All the verse I have written on an urgent topic in a mood of extreme exaltation and which I liked at the time, has always seemed trivial a day later, unfinished, lopsided. I have always desperately wanted to make changes.

Consequently, when I have finished a piece, I lock it away in my desk for several days, after which I take it out and I'm immediately able to see the faults I missed at first.

Even so, this doesn't mean that the writer should never write occasional pieces. On the contrary, he must do just that. I'm only drawing the attention of poets to the fact that what are considered as light propaganda pieces actually demand highly intensive work and considerable ingenuity to compensate for the lack of time.

Even when working on a propaganda rush job, you must make your fair copy in the evening, not in the morning. Even if you only give it a cursory glance in the morning, you will see much that can easily be improved. If you copy it out in the morning—most of what is bad will survive. The ability to create distances and organise time (I don't mean iambs and trochees) should be incorporated as a basic rule in every textbook on poetry production.

That is why I made more progress with the Yesenin poem during the short run from the Lubyansky Proyezd to the Tea Shop on Myasnitskaya Street (I was on my way to pay off a sub), than during the whole of my journey. Myasnitskaya Street came as an abrupt and necessary contrast: after the loneliness of hotel rooms, the crowded thoroughfare; after the quiet of the provinces, the excitement and jauntiness of the buses, cars and trams; and all round, like a challenge to the old wick-lamp villages, the electrical engineering offices.

I go about waving my hands and mumbling almost incoherently, slowing down so as not to disturb my mumbling, or mumbling quicker in order to keep time with my feet.

That is the way to shape and plane rhythm, the basis of all poetry, which runs through it in the form of a subdued roar. Gradually, you begin to extract individual words from the roar.

Some words bounce off never to return, others stick, are turned over and over and inside out dozens of times, until you feel that the word has fallen into place (this feeling, which matures with experience, is what is called talent). More often than not, the first word to stand out is the key one which carries the meaning of the poem, or a word which lends itself to rhyme. The rest arrive and are fitted in to correspond to the main word. When the thing is basically ready, there is a sudden feeling that the rhythm is broken—there's a syllable or sound missing. You start cutting and rearranging it all over again and the work nearly drives you frantic. You can measure the crown a hundred times and still it won't fit the tooth. Finally, after hundreds of try-outs, you push it on and it slips into position. This comparison is doubly real for me, because when I finally get the crown to hold, actual tears of pain and relief come to my eyes.

Where the basic roar-rhythm comes from, I don't know. For me, it's every inner recurrence of a sound, a noise, a swaying, or even, generally speaking, the recurrence of any phenomenon which I isolate as a sound. Rhythm can come with the incessant sound of the surf, with the chambermaid who bangs on the door every morning and, by constant repetition, weaves a pattern that splashes about in my consciousness; or even with the rotation of the earth which to me, like the working model in a visual aids shop, ludicrously alternates and is linked with the whistle of the rising wind.

The effort of organising movement, of organising the sounds one hears, finding their character and their idiosyncrasies, is one of the most important and continual tasks of poetic composition—rhythmic work-pieces. I don't know whether rhythm exists outside me or only inside—inside, most likely. But there must be a shock to evoke it, even as the innards of a grand piano will boom in sympathy with a creak somewhere; even as

a bridge, swaying to the tread of an army of ants marching in step, will threaten to collapse.

Rhythm is the basic force and the basic energy of poetry. It cannot be explained, it can only be described, like the effects of magnetism or electricity. Magnetism and electricity are forms of energy. The rhythm may be identical in many poems, even in everything the poet has written, but this doesn't make that work uniform, since rhythm can be so complex and difficult of formulation that the poet may totally fail to achieve it in a number of major works.

The poet must cultivate in himself this feeling for rhythm without memorising other people's measures. Iambics, trochaics, and even the much sanctified free verse—all these are rhythms adapted to a concrete occasion and only applicable to that concrete occasion. For example, magnetic force induced in a horseshoe will attract steel pen-nibs and is useless for any other purpose.

I don't know a single one of the metres. Personally, I'm convinced that for heroic and majestic effects you should use long, multisyllabic lines, and for the lighter effects, short ones. For some reason, since my childhood (since I was nine), the whole of the first group has been associated in my mind with

A victim you fell on the field of the fray...

and the second with

Allons enfants de la patrie!...

Strange, but true.

Metre comes to me as a result of investing that rhythmic roar with words—words suggested by the target of the poem (You keep asking yourself: is that the right word? What sort of audience am I going to have? Will it be taken the way I mean? Etc.), words governed by the highest sensitivity, abilities, talent.

At first, the poem to Yessenin was just a mumble, rather like this:

Ta-ra-rá / ra rá / ra, ra, ra, rá (ra rá)
ra-ra-ri / ra ra ra / ra ra / ra ra ra ra /
ra-ra-ra / ra-ra ra ra ra ra ri /
ra-ra-ra / ra ra-ra / ra ra / ra / ra ra.

Then words begin to take shape:

You have found ra ra ra other spheres
It may be, you fly ra ra ra ra ra
No more subs, or lady loves, or beers.
Ra ra ra / ra ra ra ra / sober.

I say this over and over again, listening intently to the first line:

You have found ra ra ra other spheres.

But what about that confounded “ra ra ra” and how to fill it in? Perhaps drop the rarara’s altogether.

You have found other spheres.

No! It’s a reminiscence of a line you heard once:

Horse went down in the field.

What’s horse got to do with it? It’s about Yesenin, not a horse. And then, without these syllables, it becomes a sort of operatic gallop, and the “ra ra ra” keeps it on a higher plane. The “ra ra ra” mustn’t be dropped at any cost—the rhythm’s correct. I start looking for the right words.

You have found, Seryozha, other spheres.
You have found, irrevocably, other spheres.
You have found, Yesenin, other spheres.

Which of these lines is best?

All rubbish! Why?

The first line rings false because of the “Seryozha”. I was never on such back-slapping terms with Yesenin, and the word is inadmissible even now, since it carries in its train a host of other false endearments which are not typical of me or of the relationship between myself and Yesenin.

The second line is bad because the word “irrevocably” is not inevitable enough, is uncalled for, and was only put in for the metre’s sake. It doesn’t help, it doesn’t clarify anything, and it only gets in the way. And, indeed, why irrevocable? Who ever heard of anybody dying revocably? Since when was there ever a return ticket to death?

The third line is no good because of its extreme earnest-

ness (the target gradually brings it home to me that this is a fault in all three lines). Why is this earnestness inadmissible? Because it ascribes to me belief in a life beyond the grave biblical style, which I happen not to hold—that's reason number one; and, two, such earnestness simply turns the poem into a funeral ode instead of one with a message, thereby losing sight of the target completely. So I modify the line with the phrase "as some might say".

"You have found, as some might say, another spheres." The line is complete. "As some might say" while not openly derisive, reduces the pathos subtly and at the same time obviates all possible suspicions of the author's belief in any bunkum about the life-after-death. The line is complete and immediately becomes a key to the whole quatrain—it must have a dual force, not dancing on Yesenin's grave, and yet not drawing floods of tiresome tears. The quatrain should be divided into two couplets: two serious lines, and two colloquial ones on an ordinary level, each acting as a contrast to the other. And so, obeying my conviction that reducing the number of syllables lightens a line, I now set to work on the second half of the stanza.

No more subs, or lady loves, or beers.
Ra ra ra ra ra ra ra sober.

What am I to do about these lines? How am I to cut them down? "Or lady loves" will have to go. Why? Because these women are still living. To refer to them in this way when most of Yesenin's lyrics were dedicated to them with great tenderness would be tactless. Therefore it's false, and therefore it sounds wrong. Which leaves:

No more subs or beers.

I try muttering it to myself—it doesn't work. These lines are so different from the first two that the rhythm is not so much altered as broken, dislocated. I've chopped it up, so what am I to do now? More is needed. With the rhythm lost, the line has become false from the other point of view as well—that of meaning. It doesn't make a big enough contrast and it attributes all the "subs and

beers" to Yesenin alone, when they apply to all of us every bit as much.

How am I going to make these lines contrast more and, at the same time, give them a more general application?

I take something straight from common parlance:

Life is not all beer and skittles.

Life is not all subs and beers.

In more colloquial and vulgar form, this could go:

Not a hope in hell of beer and skittles.

Not a hope in hell of subs and beers.

The line has finally taken shape in metre and in meaning. "Not a hope in hell of" contrast much more strongly with the first two lines and the phrasing "you have found", while "Not a hope in hell of" in the third immediately makes it clear that the subs and beer have not been put in out of disrespect to Yesenin's memory, but are a general phenomenon. This line is now a good starting point for cutting out all the syllables before "sober", and "sober" acts as a solution to the problem. And so the quatrain wins over even Yesenin's most fanatic disciples, while still essentially almost mocking in tone.

The stanza is to all intents and purposes finished, and there is only one line left without a matching rhyme.

You have found, as some might say, another spheres.

It may be you fly ra-ra-ra-ra.

Not a hope in hell of subs and beers—

Sober. . . .

Could it be left unrhymed, perhaps? No. Why? Because without rhyme (understanding rhyme in the broad sense of the word) the line hangs in mid-air.

A rhyme takes you back to the previous line, compels you to memorise it, and makes all the lines developing a single idea hang together.

Rhyme is usually taken to mean the jingle of the last words in a couplet, when there is a coincidence between the stressed vowel and the sounds following it.

This is the general view, and it's nonsense nevertheless.

End-jingle, or rhyme, is only one of countless means of linking up lines, and it's worth pointing out that it is the most elementary one and the most crude.

The beginnings of lines can be made to rhyme:

Places—

Faces of mongrels hungrier than the years,

etc.

The end of one line can rhyme with the beginning of the next:

The rain is dismal, squints its eyes,

I spy behind the natty lattice. . .

etc.

The end of the first line and the end of the second can rhyme with the last word of the third or fourth line:

'Mid serried ranks of learned men

Gaily, gaily,

He muddled up his Russian poetry, did Shengeli,

etc., etc. ad infinitum.

The word "sober" must be rhymed in this verse.

The first to come into my head are words such as "rover" for example:

You have found, as some might say, another spheres.

It may be you fly . . . always a rover!

Not a hope in hell of subs and beers.

Sober. . . .

Will this rhyme do? No. Why? First, because it is too obvious, too transparent. When you say "sober", the rhyme "rover" suggests itself automatically, and once it's been said, it doesn't surprise or hold the attention. This is the fate of nearly all uniform words, when verb rhymes with verb, substantive with substantive, with like roots or case endings, etc. The word "rover" is bad for another reason: it introduces too light a note into the opening lines, thereby weakening any subsequent contrast. Mightn't it be possible to make things easier by replacing "sober" with something easier to rhyme, or not to put "sober" at the end of the line, or add a few syllables on to the end, for instance: "sober, quiet"? . . . In my opinion, this is not allowable. I always put the key word at the end of the line and find a rhyme to match it at all costs. As a result, my rhymes are nearly always

unusual and certainly not used before me, and they are not to be found in any rhyming dictionary.

Rhyme cements the lines and so the material of the rhymes must be much stronger than the material going to make the other lines.

Taking the most characteristic sound of the word to be rhymed—"ober"—I repeat it to myself many times over, listening to all the possible combinations: "obe", "lobe", "strobe", "adobe", "probe"—"*probing*". The happy rhyme has been found at last! A verb, and a serious one too!

Unfortunately, the word "sober", although not as characteristic as "probe", has a distinct "s" sound. What is to be done about this? The answer is to introduce analogous sounds into a previous line.

"It may be" is therefore replaced by "emptiness" with its strong sibilants.

Here, then, is the final version:

You have found, as some might say, another spheres.

Emptiness—you fly, the distant starways probing. . . .

Not a hope in hell of subs and beers.

Sober.

I am, inevitably, oversimplifying and subordinating poetic composition to cerebral selection. The writing process is much more haphazard and intuitive. But generally speaking, the work follows this kind of pattern.

The first quatrain determines the rest of the poem. With the first stanza in hand, I estimate the number of similar verses which will be necessary for the given theme and how to distribute them for the best possible effect (architectonics of verse).

The theme is large and complex, so the poem will have to run to twenty or thirty quatrains, sextains, and couplet-bricks.

After accumulating nearly all of these bricks, I begin measuring them, putting them first here and then there, listening to the sound of them, and trying to form some idea of the impression created.

Having made my preliminary fittings and thought them over, I make up my mind: first I must puzzle all my readers by not making it clear whose side I'm on; then I must

built up solely on similes—it was all “like, like and like”. Isn’t it this primitivism which induces my later admirers to regard *The Cloud in Pants* as a “culminating” poem? In my later work and in my *Yesenin*, this primitivism has, of course, been expunged. I have only found one simile: “as wearisome and long-winded as Doronin”.

Why Doronin and not, say, the distance to the moon? First, the simile has been taken from literary life, because the whole theme is literary. Second, the *Iron Ploughman* (have I got it right?) is longer than the journey to the moon because that journey is unreal, whereas the *Iron Ploughman* is only too real, unfortunately, and, moreover, the journey to the moon would seem shorter by virtue of the novelty, while 4,000 lines of Doronin have the monotonous effect of a verbal and rhymed landscape seen 16 thousand times. Then, again, the image must be tendentious, i.e., when a major theme is being developed, separate small images encountered on the way must be enlisted for the fray, for literary propaganda.

Also used extensively in image-making are metaphors, when definitions, hitherto applicable only to certain objects, are transferred to other words, objects, phenomena, and concepts.

This line, for instance, contains a metaphor:

And rejected poetry’s old funereal scrap.

We know what scrap iron is. But how to define the unused poetic waste for which no use has been found after other poetic work? Of course, it’s scrap verse, scrap poetry. In this case, it’s scrap of a certain kind—the funereal kind. It’s funereal poetry’s old rejected scrap. But the line can’t be left in this form, since you have “rejected scrap”, which can sound like “reject its crap”, and this shift, as it is called, distorts the meaning of the whole line. This kind of slip is very common.

For example, in a lyric by Utkin, recently published in *Projector*, there is a line:

He won’t come to *this spot* at all,
Any more than summertime swan to the lake when
the snowflakes fall.

“*This spot*” comes out quite clearly as “*this pot*”.

The first line of a poem published by Bryusov in the magazine *Our Days* early in the war is highly effective: Warriors we, with wounds that worry us.

In my own line, the shift is eliminated by reordering the words to give the simplest and most precise definition.

... old poetry's funereal scrap.

One method of image-making used most frequently by me in recent times has been the creation of the most fantastic events-facts underlined by hyperbole.

So that Kogan deploy in all directions
Maiming all he meets with lance moustaches.

Here, Kogan becomes a collective noun, which means he can deploy in all directions; his moustaches become lances; and to emphasise their sharpness, people lie all over the place wounded by them.

Means of image-building can be varied (like all other poetic techniques) depending on the reader's satiety with this or that form.

There can also be reverse imagery, i.e., that which, so far from stimulating the imagination further, actually tries to restrict the impression given by the words into a deliberately limited framework. For example, in an old poem of mine, *War and Peace*:

In a stinking railway truck for 40 men—
4 legs.

Many of Selvinsky's poems are based on this kind of numerical image.

Next comes work on the selection of verbal material. It is essential to bear in mind the exact medium in which the poetic work is being developed, so that no word alien to this medium should accidentally get in.

For instance, I had this line:

Such a gift, *my dearest friend*, was yours.

"My dearest friend" is phoney, first, because it is at variance with the severely accusatory tone of the piece; second, we've never used this term in our poetic environ-

ment. Third, it is a trivial expression, normally heard in insignificant small-talk, and used to shade over feeling rather than highlight it; fourth, a man truly affected by sorrow is more likely to hide it with a much cruder expression. Besides, the term doesn't make it clear what the person, or persons, could do.

What was it that Yesenin could do? His lyrics are currently much in demand and are the subject of detailed and ecstatic scrutiny. But Yesenin's literary progress proceeded along the lines of what is known as the literary scandal, an inoffensive thing, quite respectable, and (an echo, or sideline, of the celebrated futurist shows), but it is these scandals that were the literary landmarks, or stages, in Yesenin's career.

How inappropriate to say of him when he was alive: Such a gift for heartfelt song was yours.

Yesenin didn't sing (he was, of course, essentially a gypsy guitarist, but it was his poetic salvation that he was not recognised as such in his lifetime and there are at least a dozen poetically original places) in his books. Yesenin didn't sing, he shocked and outraged. Only after long reflection have I written: "Such a gift for sheer outrage was yours", however much it may go against the grain with the pupils of literary brothels who spend all day listening to outrages galore and dream, in poetry, of unburdening their souls with lilacs, breasts, harmonies and damask'd cheeks.

Without comment, I reproduce the stage-by-stage polishing of a single line of verse:

- 1) These our times for gaiety are very ill equipped.
- 2) These our times for joyfulness are very ill equipped.
- 3) These our times for happiness are very ill equipped.
- 4) This our life for gaiety is very ill equipped.
- 5) This our life for joyfulness is very ill equipped.
- 6) This our life for happiness is very ill equipped.
- 7) This our little planet Earth for gaiety is very ill equipped.
- 8) This our little planet Earth for merriment is very ill equipped.
- 9) This our little planet Earth for gaiety is not exactly well equipped.
- 10) This our little planet Earth for merriment is not exactly well equipped.
- 11) This our wretched little planet Earth for pleasure isn't very well equipped.

and, finally, the twelfth and last—

12) This planet Earth of ours for gaiety is very ill equipped.

I could deliver a whole speech for the defence of the last line, but I will content myself with transcribing all the variants from the rough draft to give some idea of the work that goes into polishing a few words.

Technical finishing also includes the aural quality of the poetic article—the combining of words with words. “Perhaps all in life is but matter for brightly melodious song.” Many consider this aural aspect to be the sole purpose of poetry, but once again, it’s a reduction of poetry to the level of technique. An excess of harmonies, alliterations and the like can cloy after a minute’s reading.

For example, Balmont:

I waft at will, I’m the wind so wayward;
I woo the waves . . . etc.

Alliteration should be meted out in extremely sparing doses and as far as possible without obtrusive repetition. There is an example of clear alliteration in a line of my Yesenin poem:

With boom of bronze and granite’s grain. . .

I resort to alliteration when I want to bring out a word important to me so that it acquires greater impact. Alliteration may be used for simple word-play, for poetic fun. The old (old to us, that is) poets used alliteration primarily for melodious effect, for the music of the words, and so they used onomatopoeia, a type of alliteration which I personally detest. I have already mentioned these tricks of alliteration in discussing rhyme.

A poem does not, of course, have to be fitted out with fancy alliterations and crammed with surprise rhymes. Always bear in mind that economy in art has invariably been the most important rule if you are going to produce a work of aesthetic value. Consequently, when you have done the basic work, as described at the beginning of this article, many aesthetic touches and decorative effects must be consciously shaded over in order to highlight other places.

You can, for example, half-rhyme certain lines, link too harsh a sounding verb with another one, in order to lead up to a brilliant and resounding rhyme.

This is yet another instance of the relativity of all rules for writing verse.

Technical finishing also includes intonation.

You must not write a piece as if it were intended to function in airless space or, as often happens with poetry, in too airy a space.

You must always bear in mind the audience to whom the poem is addressed. This is particularly important now, when the main medium of contact with the masses is the concert hall stage, the living voice, live speech.

Let your intonation be convincing or supplicatory, commanding or appealing, according to your audience.

Most of my poetry is based on colloquial intonation. But although I have it all well thought out beforehand, the intonation is not set in a hard and fast pattern, and I modify my approach according to the make-up of the audience. For instance, the printed text comes over rather impersonally, which is right for the experienced reader:

We must snatch our happiness from days to come.

Sometimes at a literary concert, I step this line up to a shout:

Slogan:

Snatch your happiness from days to come!

So don't be surprised if you find someone printing a poem with variations for several different moods and with special expressions for each and every occasion.

When you write a poem for publication, bear in mind how the printed text is going to be taken, as a printed text. You must pay attention to the average abilities of the reader; you must try in every possible way to bridge the gap between the way the reader takes the line and the form which the creator of the line wanted to give it. Our usual punctuation, with its stops, commas, question and exclamation marks is too poor and inexpressive as compared with the shades of feeling which the sophisticated man of today puts into a work of poetry.

The metre and rhythm of a piece are more important than punctuation, and they subordinate punctuation to themselves when it follows the old pattern.

Everybody reads Alexei Tolstoy's lines:

Shibanov spake not. From his gaping leg-wound
The scarlet blood flowed free.

as—

Shibanov spake not from his gaping leg-wound. . . .

Or, again:

I've had enough! Proud Polish maiden,
I am ashamed to grovel thus before thee!

can be clumsy and provincial:

I've had enough proud Polish maiden. . . .

If it is to be taken as Pushkin meant, the line must be broken up like this:

I've had enough!
Proud Polish maiden. . . .

This breaking up of the line into half-lines leaves no room for ambiguity in rhythm or meaning. The breaking up of lines is often also dictated by the need to drive home the rhythm, since our condensed and economic line structure often forces us to cut out intermediate words and syllables, and unless we make a longer pause after these syllables than between the lines, then the rhythm is lost:

That is why I write:

Emptiness. . . .
You fly,
The starways probing.

"Emptiness" stands on its own, as the only world describing the heavenly landscape. "You fly" stands on its own, so that it shouldn't be taken as an imperative.

One of the most vital moments in a poem, especially if tendentious and declamatory, is the ending. The most successful lines in the poem are usually reserved for this. Sometimes you rewrite the whole piece solely in order to justify such a transposition.

The ending to my Yesenin poem is, of course, a re-phrased version of the last lines he wrote.

It is as follows:

Yesenin's—

In this life there's nothing new in dying;
Nothing new, of course, in living either.

Mine—

In this life, there's nothing hard in dying;
Making life worth living is much harder.

During the whole of my work on the poem, I always had these two lines at the back of my mind. While working on the others, I kept returning to them—consciously or unconsciously.

It was absolutely impossible for me to forget the importance of this, and so I didn't write these lines down, I worked them out in my head (as I used to with all, and now with most, of my propaganda poems).

It is consequently impossible to reckon up the total number of versions. In any case, there were not less than 50-60 variants of these lines.

The ways of technically polishing words are infinite, it is pointless to talk about them, since the basis of poetical composition, as I have repeatedly observed in this article, is in the actual invention of polishing methods, and it is these methods that make the writer a professional. The Talmudists of poetry will probably frown at this book of mine; they love trotting out ready-made poetic recipes. Take such and such by way of content, clothe it in poetic form, iambs or trochees, rhyme the endings, slip in some alliteration, stuff with images, and the poem is ready.

But this rough-and-ready handiwork is invariably thrown, will continue to be thrown (and it's a good thing it does get thrown) into the editorial waste-paper basket.

The man who has taken a pen in hand for the first time in his life and wants to write poetry in a week does not need my book.

My book is needed by the man who wishes, despite all obstacles, to be a poet; the man who, knowing that poetry is one of the most difficult of all things to produce, wants to master for himself and for communication to

others certain seemingly mysterious production methods.

By way of general conclusions:

1. Poetry is production. Very difficult and very complex, but production.

2. Learning poetic composition is not the study of the manufacture of a definite and limited type of poetic article, but the study of methods for all kinds of poetic work, the study of production techniques which help the creation of new ones.

3. Newness—newness of material and of method—is essential for every poetic composition.

4. The poet should work every day, and this ensures the improvement of his technique and the accumulation of poetic work-pieces.

5. A good notebook and the ability to make use of it are more important than the ability to write with facility in obsolete metres.

6. There is no need to put into operation a vast verse combine in order to manufacture poetic cigarette lighters. Steer clear of such uneconomic small stuff. Only take to your pen when you have no means of expressing yourself other than in verse. Do not go into production until you are conscious of a clear social demand.

7. In order to understand the social demand properly, the poet must be at the centre of affairs and events. A knowledge of economic theory, a knowledge of everyday reality, a preoccupation with scientific history—in the essential part of his work—are more important than the scholastic textbooks of professorial idealists who go down on their bended knees before antiquity.

8. In order best to meet a social demand, you must be at the head of your class, and with your class you must wage the struggle on all fronts. You must smash to smithereens the myth of non-political art. This old fairy tale is currently gaining ground under cover of burble about “broad epic canvases” (first epic, then objective, and finally non-party), or about the grand style (first grand, then exalted, and finally celestial), etc., etc.

9. Only a production approach to art will eliminate the elements of chance, haphazardness of taste, and arbitrariness of judgement. Only a production approach

will put in their place the various literary genres from poem to worker correspondent's note. Instead of mystical reflections on a poetic theme, a production approach will facilitate a precise attitude to the new urgent problem, of poetic valuation and categorisation.

10. Final retouching, or technical finishing, must never become an end in itself. But it is these final touches that make a poetic composition fit for consumption. And it is only the difference in this processing work that makes for difference among poets; it is only knowledge, constant improvement, accumulation and variety of literary methods that can make the professional writer.

11. The everyday poetic atmosphere also influences the creation of a real work, like all the other factors. The word "bohemianism" has become a name for every kind of artistic everyday life. Unfortunately, struggle has often been waged against the word, and only against it. What in actual fact it stands for is the old atmosphere of individualistic literary careerism, petty and spiteful clique interests, intrigue, substitution of the concept "poetic" by the concepts "relaxed", "high", "debauched", etc. Even the poet's dress, even his domestic conversations with his wife, must be different and marked with the whole of his poetic work.

12. We of LEF have never claimed to be the sole possessors of the secrets of poetic creation. But we are the only ones who are willing to disclose these secrets, the only ones who do not want speculatively to surround creative work with artistico-religious reverence.

This attempt of mine is the weak attempt of one man who has merely drawn on the theoretical works of his fellow-men of letters.

These men of letters must transfer their efforts to contemporary material and give direct help to the poetry of the future.

And that's not all.

Institutions concerned with the education of the masses must inject new life into their methods of teaching the aesthetic heritage of the past.

ALEXEI
TOLSTOY



THE TASKS OF LITERATURE

...The person larger than life—the *type*—that is the aim of art. Lev Tolstoi created Platon Karatayev. There were millions of Platons wandering about Russia in those times. I don't want to read how one man disembowelled another. That's their private affair: it doesn't concern me. I want to know what that Platon is like now, all hundred million of him. Dostoyevsky created Grushenka. There was a Grushenka in every Russian woman, though there might only be a tiny drop of her. Grushenka is still with us, but she's changed. What's she like now? Would the new Grushenka go to penal servitude with me? Would Raskolnikov murder the old woman today? Would Stavrogin hang himself in the attic? But all those new types who have not yet found a name in literature, who blazed up on the bonfires of the revolution, whose ghostly hands knock on the artist's sleepless window—they are all waiting to be made flesh and blood. I want to know this *new man*. I want to know myself as I am today.

Miraculous is the power of art, when it carves the human countenance out of chaos. Art lifts me head and shoulders above the clouds. I walk with pride on this earth of mine.

* * *

I don't accept aestheticism, either when it manifests itself in Beaux Brummels or sexless girls going about chrysanthemum in hand, or when it has passed through the fire of revolution only to be transformed into constructivism, into the hypersophisticated destructiveness of a Meyerhold production.

Anti-Aestheticism Week! Aestheticism is beautification, not beauty; infatuation, not love; exasperation, not wrath. Aestheticism is cold-blooded. It's static. It contemplates without compassion. It says: "Here am I and here's the world, which I contemplate." But it never says: "All of me is in this world, and I am all this world."

Aesthetic art is distraction. It invariably raises the fateful question: "Does art have any meaning?" Aestheticism doesn't give the answer.

In opposition to aestheticism, I place the literature of *monumental realism*. Its task is the moulding of man. Its method is the creation of the type. Its ultimate significance is the universal happiness of mankind—perfection. Its faith—the greatness of man. Its path leads straight to the very highest goal—in passion and in majestic tension to create the type of the person larger than life.

* * *

A hero! We need a hero of our times. A heroic novel. We mustn't be afraid of sweeping gestures and lofty words. Life lashes out with the back of its hand and says piercing, cruel things.

We mustn't be afraid of weighty description, or long-windedness, or exhaustive and exhausting detail. Monumental realism! Let's pile Pelion on Ossa.

Russian art should be as clear and translucent as the poetry of Pushkin. It should smell of flesh and be more

substantial than ordinary life. It should be honest, matter-of-fact, and great in spirit.

Its architectonics should be on the grand scale, austere, and simple, like the dome of the sky over the limitless steppe.

Literature is one of the corner-stones of our new house.

THE ART OF WRITING

There are things it is neither good nor necessary to speak of in public. These are personal, secret and delicate matters. They should not be talked about, as a woman should not describe her first night with a man. The creative process is one of them. Writers' autobiographies are combed from beginning to end for references to these prohibited subjects. But even if any are found, the most important part is still left unsaid.

We know that Schiller found inspiration in sniffing rotten apples. But Schiller didn't say, and no one knows, through what secret thrill this smell of apples was transformed into the flesh and blood of words and rhythm. This, of course, is what makes it so fascinating. I believe that one day, science will find a formula for the oxidation of the cerebral cortex and will measure the voltage developed between the convolutions of the brain; and the creative condition will be analysed by medical students in the form of curves, graphs,

and chemical formulae. But this is science, a specialist subject. Meanwhile, to disclose the secrets of the creative process by using the medium of that very creative process—words—is like trying to catch the wind in a net.

What is left of interest in the autobiography of an artist? His life? I think that from the very moment when a man becomes a creative being, his path is predetermined. He goes where his creativeness drives him, he sees what he needs to see for his creative work. Incidentals are not important. They enrich the artist's material somewhat, but more often than not they are a nuisance, deflecting him from the straight road by which he realises his potential.

The medium that the artist studies is like the little glass pieces that cover the numbered squares on a lotto board. The lotto board is the dormant potential in me. I too will wander over the earth, seeking those little glass squares as the devil seeks the missing sleeve of his red coat. In me desires, dreams, and ideas lie dormant; not in volitional form, as with a leader, a general, a builder of life, but in feminine, emotionally creative form. The leader, the builder and the general act, break up and rebuild life; but the artist waits, seeks, and accepts in order to create it.

It sometimes happens—and this is what is so miraculous about creative art—that a phrase, a smell, a chance lighting effect, or a face turning round in the crowd, will fall into the keyed-up potential of the artist like a stone into a basalt lake, and a picture is created, a book or a symphony is written. And the artist marvels at this, as at a miracle, that involuntarily and without effort a harmonious work is being created as if it were being taken down from dictation or as if another hand were guiding the brush.

Is a man born an artist? Is the potential given to him at birth? I don't know. It seems to me that if I have inherited my great-grandfather's nose and my great-grandmother's birth-mark, then why shouldn't I inherit all the accumulated inner content of both my great-grandparents? Perhaps that's how it is. But there's more to it. I am born with all the riches of past thousands of years.

I grow up, surrendering nothing and not absorbing my environment. As a tiny being, I try with all my instincts to live in a painless, guiltless and happy "paradise". And it's here, evidently, that something very complex takes place. From my paradisaical life as a child and from the extremely fine stuff of heredity my potential is gradually built up. This growth, as I see it, lasts until the first fall from grace, that is, until the awakening of sexual energy. And this is the beginning of the pay-back, the beginning of creative art.

Next come the growth and development of mind and will. Man sets his feet more firmly on the ground. He carries within him the little world of childhood, radiant as the light of the sky, joyous as a dew-drenched glade, and complex, mutely dreaming, because in it can be heard the voices of thousands of years. This is the potential of the artist. Hence his eternal longing for a return to "paradise". Sweet yearning and unexpected joy when the sunlight suddenly scatters over the glade—*just as it used to*.

It would be a mistake to interpret my words as an assertion that creativeness is pure recollection. Such a claim would be a terrible condemnation, particularly of us, who stand on the dividing line of two epochs. Remembrance of "paradise" is an artistic pick-me-up. An elixir of life. The artist will describe life on Mars or life on Earth in ten thousand years' time, he will fly back into the wondrous mists of antiquity, but the flesh of his writing will only become living flesh when all the moments he is describing pass through his potential to be *just as it used to be*.

And now for language, the tool of production. In the beginning was the word. That's true enough—not the thought, not the feeling, but the word. But before the word, there was gesture. Gesture as movement of the body, gesture as movement of the soul. The word is a spark struck at the end of a gesture. Gesture and word are almost indivisible.

Thought and feeling not turned into words are mere blind forces of chaos.

Very few acquire mastery of the word right from the start, and they are "naturals". With me, the process of

mastering words was a long one. At first, a word was, for me, a sort of wild animal; it bucked, wouldn't obey, and carried me off into the undergrowth. Then I discovered a comfortable, easy and pleasant realm called "style". A ready-made language, long since domesticated and tamed, but dead. In our time we galvanised it, and it painstakingly served purposes which subsequently proved less lofty than was originally supposed. Came the war and, with it, impossible challenges. Where will you find the language to cope with anything so tremendous and so tragically simple as the death of millions? The contemporary language was that of translation, of the study, of the intelligentsia; it was the degenerate language of a great past. It was not much help if you had to plunge into a blood-bath. Living speech in those years was an unsophisticated scream of pain and anguish. The writer must be considered seriously in error when he begins to rely too heavily on the living speech of the times. Man weeps in his grief, he bellows in his wrath, and only at moments of peace and contentment does he feel the inclination to clothe his feelings in words (popular art).

A deciding factor for me was familiarity with 17th-century legal documents. In them I found a great artistic (but not "literary") Greater Russian language. Its very architecture reflected gesture. It was written by wise clerks, our first primitive men of letters.

1926

MY WORKING METHODS

Every day—even if only a few sentences, so as not to lose the rhythm of work. Each thought in its artistic embodiment has only one exclusive formulation, and that is the one in which the combinations of words form, as it were, a crystal. The whole of Pushkin, for instance. Daily and indefatigable practice is essential, otherwise, as invariably happens, the writer preens himself on the first successfully shaped sentence; but this does not mean that it is the right one for the given instance.

I work in the daytime. A daily stint—at least two pages on the typewriter.

If I don't manage to finish my stint in the daytime, I complete it in the evening, but never later than midnight. Otherwise, I get no sleep.

I work best (qualitatively, not quantitatively), when I'm in a bad mood, slightly unwell, or suffering from a headache. This is understandable. It's a good thing to work with

effort, struggling to get the better of the material. The more intractable it is, the more energy you put into mastering it, the higher (artistically) is the result of your labours. Writing comes easily only to those lacking in self-criticism: in other words, the ungifted. Graphomaniacs find it easier still. (Note how Pushkin or Lev Tolstoi worked on every sentence.) Writing is hard labour, exhausting and destructive. You often have to work yourself up (black coffee, tobacco) in order to reach the heights to which you aspire.

Work on historical novels (*Nineteen Eighteen* and *Peter the First*, which I'm writing at present) is complicated by a vast mass of material. It all has to be gone through, systematised, squeezed dry of everything valuable and, most important of all, the writer must detach himself from it and *make it part of his memory*.

I love the process of writing—a neat, tidy desk; elegant things on it, elegant and convenient writing equipment, good paper. Every craftsman should love the tools of his trade. Cynicism in work is impossible. When someone plays the piano in the next room, I feel as if every line I write is permeated with music. . . .

MY CREATIVE WORK

I work every day until five or six in the evening, except when I'm writing a play. This usually takes me four weeks day and night, without a break for meeting people or reading. An interruption during the writing of a play is always fatal and irremediable, since it means a break in unity of thought and imagination—I find it impossible to get back to the original exalted state of mind.

Sometimes the play is completely finished in four weeks, but more often than not it has to be modified in the theatre before and during rehearsal.

Writing a play feels like a crazy jump down a mountain slope. You don't know whether you're going to land on your four feet or be smashed to smithereens.

The novel, unlike the theatre, demands slow, thoughtful, quiet work.

Plan. I never work things out ahead in detail. The characters (in a novel or play) should live

their independent lives. You can only coax them towards the intended goal. But they sometimes disrupt the whole plan of work, take me in tow and head for different destination from the one originally intended. Such a mutiny of the characters produces the best pages.

I never look up anything in Dahl's dictionary, although there was a time when I used to. When I can't see the gesture, I can't hear the word either.

Language. Play with words is a pleasure which lightens the fatigue of work. The word should never be sought or hunted for—it should just happen, like a spark. There are no dead words; they all come to life in certain combinations.

Technique. I type out my work after having made a rough draft in ink. I hate pencil. But I'm even prepared to steal a fountain pen—they're a fetish of mine. If I were to spend my declining years in a bourgeois country, I'd probably open a stationer's shop and sell fountain pens and writing equipment.

It's claimed that using a typewriter is better, quicker and, in our conditions, when they don't let you make too many changes in the proofs, qualitatively better, than by hand. When typing (you can get used to the machine in a fortnight), you can see the text in front of you, naked and stripped of all the individual peculiarities of handwriting, with the mistakes clearly visible. This is all vitally important. Typewriting is over two or three times more intensive and productive than handwriting.

To send a handwritten manuscript for copy-typing is not the same thing. When correcting the typescript of a handwritten text, you never make the essential changes which you normally do in the heat of work.

You have to alter, and the more the better. You can't write without alterations. The notion that you can do so is rubbish. Only graphomaniacs never strike out or make changes. A man has something to worry about if he can't find a single place on a page needing erasure or correction. Few hacked their manuscripts about like Pushkin or Lev Tolstoi.

I rewrote *The Gentleman with the Limp* three times with each edition. *The Eccentrics*—three times. All my

novels and short stories up to 1917 were rewritten afterwards.

Drink and tobacco. Coffee is invaluable during work-time. Strong tea sometimes makes a substitute.

When working, I get diabolically thirsty.

One drop of alcohol puts paid to any capacity for work. It's better to smoke a pipe: you smoke less, light up more often, and don't poison yourself with so much nicotine or kipper your lungs with burnt paper. Some writers smoke like chimneys when they're at work and then complain of nerves and fatigue. Which is hardly surprising. Human lungs were not intended for the distillation of tobacco fumes.

The tobacco should be mixed. It's a good idea to put in a slice or two of Antonovka apple. I smoke a fifty-fifty mixture of "Flotsky" and "Kiset".

The pipe shouldn't be small—the little ones are only for *makhorka*—and it should be at least ten centimetres long. A curved one is best—the taste is nicer. The bowl should be thick so that it doesn't get too hot.

Observation. This is the most important part of the job: building materials acquired by observation. One should be careful how one uses the imagination. It should only be brought into action when the materials are available. As a young man, I wasn't observant, certainly less observant than is normal. I struggled with this failing, compelling myself to observe all the time—myself, people, nature. Then it became a habit.

Concerning notebooks. Rubbish. There's very little need to write things down. It's better to participate in life than to write it down in a little book. Consider this a correction to "Observation". Life is discovered from within.

1927

HOW WE WRITE

Only on two occasions have I made long preparations for work. My novel *Peter the First* was conceived as far back as the beginning of 1916, and by way of preliminaries I wrote the story *A Day with Peter* and the play *On the Rack*. My novel *Nineteen Eighteen* took a year and a half of preparatory work in collecting printed, handwritten and oral material. As the years go by, I approach the beginning of work with greater care and caution. There used to be times when I sat down at my desk like a man getting ready to be hypnotised. Just a pen, paper, a cigarette, a cup of coffee and—let it happen. Sometimes it happened and sometimes it didn't. After the third page, the doodling began and—ominous forebodings. Mightn't it be an idea to apply for some kind of steady job?

The reason behind it is this: a thinker, an artist and a critic must function simultaneously in any writer. One of these hypostases is not enough. The thinker is active, courageous.

he knows "what for", he sees the ultimate goal and he marks out the signposts. The artist is emotional, feminine, he's wrapped up in the "how" of doing, he follows the beacons, and he needs to be confined, otherwise he spills all over the place, he disintegrates, he's "a bit of a fool", if you'll forgive the expression. . . . The critic must be cleverer than the thinker and more talented than the artist; but he's not a creator and he's not active, he's ruthless.

Naturally, all three elements are needed in the creation of a major work. Hence the necessity for preparation. Impatience must be curbed. But this is not always possible. Sometimes (especially in the early years), you rely on "dictation", when you don't know yourself why the images and thoughts come as they do (every writer knows this dictation) and, obsessed by something transient, you throw yourself into your writing. . . . The story is written and is apparently successful. . . . But, I reiterate, had these been some preparatory work, that is to say, had you collected your literary or oral material and consulted the "critic", perhaps even scrapped it all and started again—the story would have been at least a hundred times more successful. Haste is a bad thing. So much passion has been spewed out on to paper, and all for nothing. The book makes a brief appearance, causes a stir, and vanishes into oblivion, simply because it was put together in haste, without reflection, without polish. But the cold Merimée shines on and his light never dims.

I've already answered the second item in the questionnaire. I use any and every material, from technical books (physics, astronomy, geochemistry) to anecdotes. When I was writing *The Garin Death Ray* (an old acquaintance of mine, Olenin, told me the true story of the construction of a double hyperboloid; the engineer who made this discovery died in Siberia in 1918), I had to familiarise myself with the latest theories of molecular physics. I was much helped by Academician P. P. Lazarev. I have been keeping notebooks for many years, but I write very little down, mostly just phrases. At first, I used to describe landscapes or incidents I had observed, etc; but none of it was ever of any use to me. The memory (of the subcon-

scious) retains everything, and it only needs stimulating. But it is essential to note down phrases and odd words. A character is sometimes born from a single phrase.

* * *

Do real people often become the prototypes of my characters? No, never. Only some striking trait, some specially vivid phrase, some distinct reaction to ordinary phenomena. Then, from this particularity and vividness (of a living person) begins the invention of my character. I catch fire, sensing what is *typical* in the person. . . .

The word "invention" (I am speaking for the benefit of the reader) shouldn't be treated as something not to be taken too seriously, along the lines of "this has been copied from life, which means it's true; but this is invention, which means it's 'literature'". . . . Of course, there is the kind of invention which rests entirely on the writer's conscience; but there is invention which opens the eyes to a typical phenomenon of life. Gogol's *The Inspector-General*, after all, is pure and almost incredible invention; but the Mayors and the Khlestakovs say how-do-you-do to us on the tram to this day. Go about the business of invention as follows. Collect the type and the typical, bit by bit. As you collect them, measure them against yourself, seek in yourself the hero, the deadly murderer, the enthusiast, the jealous woman, the rogue or the petty-bourgeois. And this brings up a very provocative question: why, with nearly all writers, are the negative types more vivid than the positive ones? The ne'er-do-well and the idler seem to leap alive from the pages of the book, whereas the noble and exalted character delivers fervid speeches, and yet you can never see his face distinctly. Did you measure him against yourself, by any chance?

I think the psychological organisation of the writer is such that, since he has the ability to transform himself and act a part, and since he loves variety and bustle, he loses in himself the use of the inflexible, superhuman, steel backbone which is natural to the hero, the highly positive character. He finds it difficult to don the ice mask that stares mercilessly and with unheeding eyes beyond the

vanity of life towards the lofty goal.... The writer is more comfortable in a simpler, more freakish mask; he pulls one straight out of the dirt, claps it on, looks, and everybody applauds.... From human weakness—that's the answer to your question. Whence the following conclusion: know the value of applause, never tire of exerting yourself—move away from the bustle of life towards the cold heights, from the freak mask to the Man-hero....

* * *

The problem of the initial impulse to work is an extremely curious one, but, as I see it, has no practical (instructional) significance. Each work starts with a different impulse. I must admit that if I were a materially secure person (which I have never been in my life), I would probably write much less and my output would probably deteriorate. The start is almost invariably made under material pressure (advances, contracts, promises, etc.). Once you begin, you become involved. *Nikita's Childhood* was written because I promised a small publishing house a children's story for a little magazine. I started work, and it was as if a window had been opened on to the distant past with all its charm, gentle sadness and keen appreciation of nature, as in childhood. The first volume of *Ordeal* was begun under powerful moral pressure. I was living just outside Paris at the time (1919), and with this work I wanted to justify my inactivity. It was the social instinct of a man at a time of revolution: inactivity was equivalent to crime. In my novel *Nineteen Eighteen*, the instinct of the artist was predominant—to formulate, arrange, and bring to life the tremendous and still smouldering past. (But there was also the contract with *Novy Mir* and Polonsky's angry letters.) Every writer is a condenser of time. Time flies with the speed of light (it may be that time *is* the speed of light). What we call space, or being, is our apprehension of time. Living for a fleeting moment on earth, we seek to prolong that moment as much as possible, to extend it down the perspective of what we have

experienced—and this is memory. Memory stops time and creates history. If we could develop memory so that all sensations left their mark on it, we would live for eternity. Art performs the function of memory: it selects from the stream of time past all that is most vivid, exciting and significant, and perpetuates it in the crystals of books. But art goes further. It tries to unfold the perspective not only in retrospect, but in advance of life: it strives to bear one forward into the future. This is particularly characteristic of our times. All inspiration is in the future. Art is faced with a very difficult task: to penetrate the misty veil of the future, lift it up, and reveal what is probable, with as much force as the past or present instant.

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When I talk about giving due preliminary thought to one's work, I don't want this to be taken to mean that I recommend writing according to a set plan. I never draw up a plan. Or, if I do, I begin deviating from it in the first few pages. For me, a plan is merely a guiding principle, series of signposts for the characters to follow. A plan, as an architectonic system worked out beforehand and divided into parts, chapters, details, etc., is a meaningless device, and I never trust those who say that they use this method. Leonid Andreyev once told me that he always drew up such a plan for each play, with all the entrances, exits, and minor details thought out and clarified. True, he really did stick to it and would write the play in four or five nights running; but the final result invariably proved dead, unconvincing, superfluous....

To write a novel (a major work), means living with your characters. You conceive them, but they must come to life and, when they do, they often want to behave differently from the way you intend them to. You begin watching how they behave, pushing them back on to the main line, suffering with them, growing with them, and sometimes even falling into the chasm with these phantoms of your own creation.... (I remember that when I was describing the death of the general in my

novel *Two Lives*, now *The Eccentrics*, I went around for several days quite broken up, as if I had been bereaved in real life.) Such a novel is organic; it's art. And you're entirely dependent on yourself: if you're a little man, then all the characters in your novel will be little people. Art is a difficult business. When you write a novel you take an examination in Human Kind.

With the theatre, the situation is somewhat different. In the theatre, time is a convention. Even the broadest canvas of life must be packed into two hours' reading. It is essential to drive the imagination hard. The beginning and end must be known exactly, the storyline must be conceived beforehand in fine detail, and also the interaction of the characters and the fate of the person (or group of persons) who carries the theme of the play. There must be no vacillation, no reservations, no half-and-half characteristics. All the characters must be in psychological motion. A play is a whole world swallowed at a single gulp.

* * *

When I'm working on something, I go through three stages. The first is usually a difficult and dangerous one. (When I was younger, I used to sit down at my desk with far less awareness of responsibility.) Once you've sensed that the rhythm has been found and the sentences have begun to "flow", there's a feeling of joy, of peace, of eagerness to work. Then, somewhere near the middle, exhaustion sets in, everything gradually begins to seem false and rubbishy—in a word, whichever way you turn, you're stuck, you're at a deadlock. You need stamina at this point—stamina to overcome your revulsion for the work, stamina to reconsider, to think things over, to find out your mistakes. . . . But don't give up—ever! Sometimes you introduce a new character and everything recovers and comes to life again. . . . Once you've floundered across these underwater rocks, you get a new lease of life, you move on towards the ending. . . . The end of a work often comes sooner than planned. With me, the ending takes place internally, so that the real ending begins to seem

unnecessary and superfluous.... But this feeling is deceptive.... At this point you must summon the thinker and the critic to the rescue—you must summon all the forces at your disposal.... An ending is a good one when the reader, having finished the book, opens it at Page One and starts from the beginning again.... The ending is the most difficult of tasks. Finding a title for the book is almost equally difficult.

* * *

The questionnaire appended here has omitted a fundamental item—language. What, in your opinion, is language? Intractable material? A dimly apprehended element in which you sometimes lose your depth? Or a region of inexhaustible beauty? What do you regard as good language? What is style? When you're at work, who leads whom? Does the language lead you, or do you force the language? Furthermore, what language do you use? The organic language of the people? Or the language of books, of literature?

Of course it would take a whole volume to answer these questions. But I'll try to give a brief account of the history of my relationship with the Russian language. In 1909, I began my first prose efforts. I was extremely embarrassed by one circumstance: I could never grasp which version of a given sentence was best. I knew from the symbolists (at that time they were at the top of the tree) that for each thought there is one single corresponding form of sentence. Problem: find it. But to me, language was a half-congealed mass that refused to crystallise out into the one-and-only sentence.

My first effort, a story called *Arkhip* (about a horse-thief), cost me no small disappointment. I wrote it five times, changing the word and sentence order and replacing some of the words with others. But I simply couldn't arrive at a final version. I could have scrapped it all over again. That summer, in Koktebel, I heard some of Henri de Régnier's short stories in translation (by Max Voloshin). I was struck by the precision of the

images: I could see them physically. In these stories, Régnier's confidently dry and precise use of language served to sketch the outlines and highlight them subtly. Needless to say, I hastened to follow suit. This proved an excellent school. I began to learn how to see, that is, to hallucinate. I subsequently developed this ability to such a pitch of intensity that often, when reminiscing, I confused reality with invention. But language was still an enigmatic and intractable element. To draw the outlines is not enough. In story-telling, one must be able to depict movement—external and internal (psychology), to write dialogue. How should one handle verbs? And at this point I plunged once again into the half-congealed mass. There was only one thing left to do: hang on to the images. I was brought up on Turgenev. I loved Gogol most of all. I covered up my inadequacies with stylisation (18th century).

All this was very fine, so long as I was engaged in digging up the past (*The Eccentrics* and *The Gentleman with the Limp* and my short novel *Under the Old Linden Trees*). But there came a day when I realised with apprehension that I must live in the present. The next two years were very difficult ones for me. My writing deteriorated steadily and became more superfluous as I floundered helplessly in the wild element of the Russian language. (Practically nothing from this period has survived in my collected works.) The war opened up vast new themes, but I was ill-equipped for plunging into those depths, and that is why two thirds of what I wrote during the war also failed to survive. Thus ended the first period of my writing career. I was flying blind. I had always been highly self-critical, but I was now beginning to despair. I couldn't move forward. At the end of 1916, the late historian V. V. Kalash, hearing of my plans to write about Peter the First, supplied me with a book. It was *Word and Deed*, the 18th-century torture notes collected by Professor Novombergsky.... Suddenly, my frail little craft sailed out of the impenetrable mist on to the shining surface of the water.... I saw, felt, and touched the Russian language.

The clerks and under-clerks of Muscovite Rus were skilled note-takers. It was their job to reproduce the victim's deposition under torture concisely and accurately, retaining all the natural idiosyncrasies of his speech. It was, in its way, a literary task. And it was here that I saw the Russian tongue in all its purity, unspoilt by dead church-slavonic forms or by efforts to turn it into a translated (from the Polish, German, or French) pseudo-literary language. It was Russian as spoken by Russians for the last thousand years or so, but never written down (except in the *The Lay of Igor's Host*, a work of genius).

The language of books, the language of the nobility, tried to get as far away as possible from everything that was base and of the people, outdoing itself in ecclesiastical and heavy-weight official majesty. No doubt the boyars thought that when they were reading a book or talking in the language of books, they were conversing like the angels in the Byzantine heaven.

As a matter of fact this tradition has lumbered down through the 18th and 19th centuries into our own times. Take a look at the language of the newspapers and, believe it or not, you will find reflections of that very same pomposity.

The trial (torture) records are written in the language of fact: there's no abhorrence of "base" speech. The Rus of the people talks, groans, lies and shrieks with terror and agony. A pure, simple, exact, vivid and supple language, as if created on purpose for great art. Carried away by my newfound treasure, I decided to try an experiment and wrote a story, *Obsession*. I was shaken by the ease with which the language crystallised out. I read the story in public while touring the provinces with a prose- and poetry-reading group in the autumn of 1918, and I lost the manuscript. Two months later, while preparing a book of short stories for publication in Odessa, I remembered it word for word, even to the last comma (only missing out one passage a few lines long). . . .

It is a primitive language, it is the foundation of the common speech, and you can easily ascertain its laws. Enriching it with the modern language, you get an

amazingly flexible and subtle instrument of *dual* action (as in any language which has been purged of dead and uncharacteristic forms); it embodies artistic thought and, embodying it, stimulates it further. Pushkin didn't just learn from the church-loaf peddlars of Moscow, he studied the history of the Pugachov rebellion, that is to say, he studied exactly the same kind of records, and was it not these that helped him create Russian "prose" (*pace* the Pushkinists!)

All know about the dual action of language. There's just one point I should like to make from my own practical experience: one should never let the tension of language slacken for a single moment. Once in a while you will write, out of mental fatigue, some passage that is only *approximate*: it's dull, the phrases lie there half-matured and dead. But the thought has been expressed, so is it really such a tragedy? Delate it ruthlessly, try to make it sing and sparkle at all costs, otherwise everything that comes after it will begin to mortify with the same gangrene.

I always try to be guided by my feelings of like or dislike of the lines as they flow. Boredom is the truest indicator of bad art. Until I've done what must be done first, I can't go on any further. Hence my method of working. I don't write rough drafts. I can't make myself sketch out, say, a short story in rough and then correct it. If I did, I'd get sick of it, I'd be bored, I'd give up. Once I've written something, it's nearly always finished (except for minor details, long-winded passages, and badly chosen words). And so I find it best to use a typewriter. A handwritten text is always confusing (bad writing, quirks of style, fewer words—compared with print—to the page); and all this is a constant barrier to detachment, to scrutinising one's own work critically, as if it were someone else's. When a sentence gets overcomplicated or when the sentences crowd each other and gallop on ahead, I just jot them down. I was never able to sketch out more than three or four pages by hand without immediately wanting to see what they looked like in print.

To return to language. Speech is born of gesture (the sum of inner and external movements). Rhythm and

vocabulary are the function of gesture. Many consider the language of Turgenev classical. I don't subscribe to this view. Turgenev is a superb narrator, a subtle and intelligent companion. (He sometimes gives the impression of thinking in French.) And everywhere, in the descriptive passages and in the voices of his characters, I can feel the language of his gestures. He brings me a beautiful phrase about objects instead of the objects themselves.

But I would like a language, not of the narrator's gestures, but of the gestures of what is being depicted. Example: steppe, sunset, dirty road. Three people riding along—one happy, one unhappy, and one drunk. Three impressions, which means three descriptions entirely different in vocabulary, rhythm, and dimensions. Here is the task: to objectify gesture. Let objects speak for themselves. The reader should not see the road and the three people with my eyes, but should travel along it with the happy one, the unhappy one, and the drunk. This can only be achieved by working on language as a primary medium, and not on language as already modified by the gestures of the writer.

How do I work on language? I try to see the object I need (thing, man, animal). I define this object by the sign that characterises its distinctive being amid the surrounding objects (example: a painted chair in an elegant room. I don't describe its form or what it's made of, I define it only as "painted"). In a human being, I try to see the gesture most characteristic of his mental state, and this gesture gives me the idea of a *verb* to convey the movement revelatory of his psychology. If movement alone is inadequate for the necessary characterisation, I seek some obvious particular (the hand, say, or the texture of the hair, or the nose, the eyes, and so forth) and, highlighting this part of the man by definition (on the analogy of the "painted chair"), I convey it in movement again, that is to say, by using a second verb I particularise and intensify the impression created by the first verb. I always seek movement so that my characters tell us about themselves in the language of gesture. My task is to create a world and admit the reader to it.

Once he's there, he will establish contact with the characters, not in my words, but in the unwritten and inaudible ones which he himself picks up from the language of gesture.

Style. I take it to be this: a correspondence between the rhythm of a sentence and its inner gesture. To work on style means, first, consciously to sense this correspondence, then to particularise definitions and verbs, and then to reject without compunction everything superfluous: not one sound "for the sake of beauty". One adjective is better than two, and if you can dispense with adverb and conjunction, do so. Sift out all the rubbish, get rid of the cloudiness in the heart of the crystal. Don't be afraid if the sentence is cold; it has lustre.

What word-order gives a sentence its greatest emotional force? We'll assume that economy and precision have already been observed. The nearest word (counting from left to right) carrying the main rhythmic stress of the sentence should be the concept by virtue of which you are composing the sentence in question. It should give the first reflex. For example: "His distorted features were covered with pallor." What is essential here is the fact of the distorted features. "Pallor covered his distorted features." Here, it is the pallor that matters. The substantive in this sentence carries no reflex, since it is understood, and so the "features", in the second version, skip rhythmically to the end of the sentence. "Features" is the second important word in the first sentence simply because, if it were put at the end (i.e., "Distorted, with pallor were covered his features"), then the rhythmic stress would fall not on "distorted", but on "pallor" ("were covered his features" and would become a rhythmic spring-board instead of an emotional image), and you would fail in your intention. The position of the auxiliary verb "were" is entirely dependent on the rhythm.

If the reader is curious to know what sensations I associate with finishing a work, I have to reply—emptiness, as of departed love, a return to everyday life and to idle pastimes; and, of course, some satisfaction that the job is done. Small satisfaction, since the work has

already been finished twenty times over in one's thoughts. . . .

. . . One more general question. When working, like the majority of writers, I say my lines out loud. If you don't do this already, you should try it. You won't feel embarrassed for long at being heard by the rest of the household. . . . I think that speaking the lines aloud is an essential part of the work and a tricky one. You can say them in such a way that all the mistakes are camouflaged by your declaiming; or so that those very mistakes grate on your nerves like cork squeaking on glass. It all depends on whose voice you use, your own writer's voice, full of false solemnity and leavened with self-satisfaction (unavoidable, this), or the voice of the characters in whom you project yourself (through gesture and hallucination), while simultaneously listening to them with your outer ear (critic). It's a fine art—declaiming, pulling faces, talking to phantoms, and running round your study.

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Do I alter the text with subsequent editions? Yes. Every new edition means a new text. Some of my novels (*The Eccentrics*, *The Gentleman with the Limp*) were rewritten three times. I'll give up altering when I'm on the way out, but as long as I can see my own mistakes, it means I'm still developing.

1929

TRANSCRIPT OF AN INTERVIEW WITH
THE EDITORIAL TEAM OF THE MAGAZINE
SMENA

Question. There's your story about Peter the First. There's your play. Now you've written a novel. What attracts you to this theme?

Answer. (A. Tolstoy). The story about Peter the First was written at the beginning of the February revolution. I don't recollect any initial inspiration. Undoubtedly, this story was written under the influence of Merezhkovsky. It's a weak thing. The beginning of the epic was the play about Peter. At that time, I didn't understand what I understand now, and there's still much romanticism in the play. There was no real study of material behind it. A writer grows up with his times. Every new work is simultaneously his university and the product of his growth.

Question. What historical documents did you use when working on your novel *Peter the First*.

Answer. As regards this chapter, it's entirely documentary. Ukraintsev's letters are authentic. Everything in it is historically true, even to

the incident with the Sultan's wives and the sale of coffee to the Moscow Vice-Admiral.

The Kerch campaign is the first attempt at a real policy of action. The Russians got what they were after, the Turks never expected such a diversion, such energy on the part of the Muscovites, and they signed a peace treaty.

It's not my job to invent facts, but to disclose the true causes of the facts—which is much more interesting.

Question. How many books are there going to be in the novel altogether?

Answer. Three. Book One of Part Two covers 1700-1718. A brief upsurge of commercial and industrial capitalism, ending in the counter-revolution of the nobility. The nobility penetrated into the whole of the state administration, the entire government apparatus was in their hands. Book Two of Part Two is Peter's struggle with the counter-revolution of the nobility, a struggle that ended in terror (trial of the tsarevich Alexei).

Question. How did you create the character of Peter? After all, historical documents can't give a complete picture of a character, and you, as the creator, bring a subjective factor into your portrayal. How important is this subjective factor, insofar as you stay true to the documentary material?

Answer. Each document should be approached critically, with a view to establishing what's true in it and what's false. There are probably comrades amongst you working on the history of the Civil War. As you know, many eyewitness reports are written down years afterwards, and they're full of inaccuracies. Any deviation from the truth must be pinned down, you must cultivate a historical flair, and this undoubtedly develops with practice. Documents must be collated. The most important are undoubtedly letters. Generally speaking, work on documents is a vital aspect of a writer's work.

Question. Did Peter himself really work in the shipyards as a smith and a carpenter, as the old textbooks say? If we look into Peter's origins, we find that his father, Alexei Mikhailovich, was of an idle disposition and

loved falconry. How does this explain a gigantic figure like Peter?

Answer. I'm convinced that Peter was the son of the Patriarch Nikon, not of Alexei Mikhailovich. Nikon was of peasant stock, a Mordvinian. At twenty, he was already a priest, then a monk, and he quickly climbed the ladder from Bishop to Patriarch. He was an ambitious, intelligent, wilfull, strong type of man.

Peter's official grandfather, Tsar Mikhail Fyodorovich, was a degenerate. Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich was no fool, but he was indecisive, flabby, half-and-half. He has nothing in common, internally or externally, with Peter. I have a mask of Peter found by Benois, the artist, in the Hermitage cellars in 1911. The mask was taken during Peter's lifetime in 1718 by Rastrelli. There are points of resemblance with the portrait of Nikon. Peter really was a knowledgeable craftsman, a smith, a carpenter, and a first-rate wood-carver. He loved work and craftsmanship, and he expected them of other people.

Question. In your novel, Peter stands on his own. He acts as if he carries the whole epoch on his shoulders. He has no supporters. How should Peter be interpreted from the Marxist viewpoint?

Answer. The emergence of a personality in an historical epoch is a very complex thing. It's one of the tasks of my novel.

Peter's personality proved exceptional and it began to exert its own influence on the era. Peter becomes a fulcrum of active forces, he takes his place at the head of the class struggle between the landed gentry and the newly emerging bourgeoisie. But, I repeat, not a passive fulcrum, but an active one, a strong-willed one. The epoch needed a man, he was being looked for, and he was himself seeking an outlet for his energies. So there was interaction here. Of course, he could do nothing on his own. But there were forces building up round him. When he found himself outside the class struggle, he was left on his own and he was finished (this is the content of Volume Three).

Question. Why did certain groups support Peter and then drop him?

Answer. The bourgeoisie pushed him to the forefront.

On the one hand, there was great influence from the West. Europe saw Russia as a raw materials market. For Europe, Russia was a second India. When the upsurge of commercial capitalism began in the West, when they began building big ships, they needed enormous supplies of timber, pitch, hemp, hides, tallow and saltpetre. All these were obtainable in Russia.

On the other hand, there was Russian commercial capital and the beginnings of industrial capital. Industrial capital was controlled by the Schismatics. The Schism was an economic movement. Many may be misled by such facts as the self-immolation by fire of three thousand people at a time. But the ringleaders themselves managed to stay whole. Masses of people burned themselves alive. There grew up round the Schism an atmosphere of fanaticism which was necessary for the challenges facing commerce.

What did commerce mean in those times? To trade over an area stretching from old Novgorod to Tyumen, Amur, and Baikal was no easy matter. Turnover took anything from two to three years. Trusty people were needed, and likewise severe discipline.

And so the traders appointed were fanatics who believed that eternal torment awaited them if they withheld from the boss so much as a single kopek. The Schismatics had a strong and solid organisation; they owned three quarters of Russian capital. Almost the whole of industry in the north was created by the Schismatics. The entire Urals were in their hands. Part of the movement supported Peter, primarily the industrial group; but commercial Schismatic capital was at loggerheads with innovation, with everything new, with everything foreign. These looked on Peter as Antichrist.

All this has been studied but little. It's a complex historical process.

Question. Did Peter overreach himself sometimes?

Answer. He undertook to regulate industry, trying to achieve something half-way between state and private industry. But private industry had to be subordinate to state industry and be kept under constant control and supervision by the government.

Here's an example. Peter issues an order: cloth is to be woven 16 vershoks* wide, and anyone weaving 12 vershoks will have his nostrils torn off and be exiled for life. This started a crisis, because there were no big mills and all weaving was a handicraft. The looms in the peasants' cottages were of limited size, and to weave 16-vershok cloth meant using looms too big for the cottages. The weavers were ruined and cloth production slumped.

Question. Each of your principal characters speaks a language peculiar to him alone. How did you achieve this?

Answer. Simply a matter of experience in writing plays. After all, I've written twenty-two plays and staged seventeen of them. Every writer needs to acquire experience in writing drama. What does he get out of it? The knack of condensed form, of vigorous action, of dialogue and of quick psychological characterisation. In the novel, you can sometimes get away with irresponsible chatter or with any old description of nature. But not in a play, where man is the writer's only object.

The problem of language cannot be overemphasised. I remember that when I began writing stories, I often rewrote them two, sometimes three and four times. And each time I rewrote them, I used to change the language. And so I asked myself, why must the words be put this way and not that? Why must the words be arranged thus, and not otherwise? What are the laws of language? I neither knew nor understood them. In the beginning, in order to avoid this vacillation, in order to consolidate language in myself, I imitated that of Gogol and Turgenev. First Turgenev, then Gogol. I judged by ear. If my language was close to that of Gogol, then that meant it was good. Which was, in fact, bad, because it was only imitation, the reflection of a powerful light.

In 1917, I made a discovery of the greatest importance to me. I've written and spoken about it many times. I had the good fortune to read Professor Novomberg'sky's book *Word and Deed*. It contained 17th and 18th-century court records. They were written as follows. In the *prikaz*

* 1 *vershok*—approximately 4.4 centimetres.—*Ed.*

(cellar), the person under interrogation was suspended on the rack, tortured, flogged with the knout, and burned with the burning crown. He would say insane things, untrue as often as not. They tortured him again and again in order to get his statements to correspond.

Recording these depositions was a very responsible job. The scribes who took them down were learned men. They had to write everything in compressed form so as to preserve all the individual character of the person concerned, the statements had to be reproduced accurately and concisely. It was essential to preserve succinctness and accuracy of expression, and to give short and vigorous sentences in a living, not in a literary, language. These records are of great artistic value. You can use them to study the Russian language. They are monuments of the real language of the people, presented in literary form.

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When you write, you should see the object you are writing about, and you should see it in motion. You can't write much about immovable objects. Describe a street or a house. What can you write about a house? You can say what colour it is, how many stories, and so forth. But as soon as an object is in motion, then it has gesture, it has direction, it has purpose. And so as soon as you see an object in motion, you can find the verb for that object.

Motion and its expression—the verb—are the basis of language. To find the right verb for a sentence is to give that sentence motion.

The literary language before the Petrine era was church-slavonic. It was written by the clergy and a small section of the laity. From Peter onwards, church-slavonic began to die out, since it couldn't be used to express everything that came in with the new epoch—technology, science, economics, and so forth. But where was the new literary language to be found? And this is where they began picking up German, Dutch and French words and turns of speech. They began to transplant on to Russian soil the complexities of the subordinate clauses typical of German and French.

The entire literary language of the 18th century was artificial and not really a living thing. In the 19th century, despite Pushkin's purification of the language, despite the heights attained by other writers, the literary language was nevertheless a hothouse product. Even Lev Tolstoi, for all his efforts to achieve an austere simplicity, sometimes lost himself in a maze of subordinate clauses.

But a sentence of the Russian language is simple, short, and vigorous. Chekhov said, "The sea was wide. . . ."

When I write, "N.N. was walking down a dusty road," you see a dusty road. If I say, "N.N. was walking down a road as dusty as a grey carpet," your imagination has to visualise a dusty road and clutter it up with a grey carpet. One image on top of another. There's no need to overload the reader's imagination like that. Be cautious in your use of metaphor. No similes, except similes that give added force. For instance, "the surface of the water, shining like a mirror." It does not overload the imagination to visualise a mirror. It is taken for granted and is already a reflex. The mirror simile adds to the sheen, but if the simile is a second superstructure, then it is inadmissible. The reader won't forgive you for overloading him.

Question. You say that we should aim for plain language; but this could become a dead end. Language must be constantly improved and modified, after all.

Answer. What I mean is that, generally speaking, the official language was artificially transplanted from the West. Language should be a living, changing, growing thing. It must be unburdened from overlays not inherent in the simple Russian language: it must be liberated from canons that came in from the West. One must master simplicity of language and then experiment at will. But first of all—simplicity, precision, clarity, the maximal stimulation of the reader's imagination, but without forcing it.

Question. Modern Russian has many stratifications. For instance, the collective farmer who doesn't speak the language of the people, but talks bad journalese. There are many international influences. How is the literary language to be moulded in the light of these influences?

Answer. Is it possible to write a novel in the language used by a collective farmer? My answer would be, if you have real mastery of the language and know its roots and fundamentals, and if you purposely make a collective farmer talk so that he gives the impression of speaking bad journalese, then that's good, that's art; but if you write that novel in bad journalese, it's naive of you to think that in this way you're getting nearer the truth. The collective farmer develops and learns. One day, perhaps he, and certainly his son, will speak not journalese, but a real, proper language. And then he will say to you, "Why did you teach us to speak so badly?"

It's another matter if you're writing, say, a comedy, and your characters are meant to speak badly. A comedy of this kind can hit at those who don't want to grow up with the growth of culture. After all, language grows up with culture. . . .

Question. You were saying that the verb plays the principal part in language. What about that poem of Fet's with no verbs, "Whispering and timid breathing. . . ."?

Answer. I don't like that poem. It's sentimental. It's decadent verse. The verbs have all been left out. You have to imagine them for yourself. The imagination suggests banal ones. If he had used some verb, unusually precise, to convey the whispering of the leaves in June before a thunderstorm, if he had used a verb, then you would be able to smell a real thunderstorm.

Question. You also mentioned the complexity of some of Tolstoi's sentences. But he does have short sentences which express great ideas—for example, in the description of the battle of Borodino.

Answer. Tolstoi is a writer of genius. He reaches such heights of language that it hurts the eyes to see everything so clearly; but when Tolstoi allows himself to philosophise, then the result is not so good. This confirms my theory—when Tolstoi writes as a pure artist, he sees things with his own eyes. He sees movement and gesture almost to hallucination and finds the appropriate words. But when he writes of abstract things, he doesn't see, he *thinks*. . . .

Question. How do you rate Dostoyevsky's use of language?

Answer. Dostoyevsky's language is very simple. He's all in the dialogue. He made his mistakes, but in his best things he approaches language through gesture. Take Stepan Trofimych from *The Possessed*. You see how he speaks, how he moves, how he pauses, how he gesticulates. And this is not written. It's seen through gesture. You can see the characters, you can even see the colour of their faces, because gesture comes through in every sentence. Dostoyevsky saw people when he was writing about them.

I don't want to preach the virtues of the short sentence, but a sentence that comes from gesture cannot be a long one.

A friend once came to visit Balzac, knocked on the door, and heard Balzac quarrelling violently with someone and shouting, "I'll show you, you scoundrel!" The friend opened the door to find Balzac alone in his room. The novelist had been shouting at a character of his whom he'd discovered doing something despicable. Balzac had been hallucinating. Every writer should see to hallucination what he is describing. One should cultivate this property in oneself.

Question. Why did you change from verse to prose?

Answer. I began by writing verse and never imagined I would write prose. I tried many times, but nothing came of it. They were commonplace, dull stories. I never even finished many of them.

Two years passed. I became aware of a contradiction. You'll find this funny, but it's the honest truth. I was always a fat healthy fellow, and I wrote verse slowly. I began to feel that this was a far from honourable occupation—a healthy chap like me spending half the day hunting for a rhyme. The reason is, of course, that I hadn't the poet's temperament. I never was a poet. Even to this day, I write hack verse. For the opera *Polina Annenkova*, to give an example.

FESTIVAL OF IDEAS, THOUGHTS, IMAGES

An unentertaining novel or an unentertaining play is a cemetery of ideas, thoughts and images. A man may spend his rest-day at home on the divan yawning with boredom and think nothing of it. It's always possible to make up for lost time. But a minute of boredom on the stage or fifty pages of unmitigated tedium in a novel is a chilling thing, almost the equivalent of murder. Never, not by any means, can the reader be made to apprehend the world through boredom. Art is a festival of ideas, and that is what the reader and the spectator want it to be.

There are genres with undoubted entertainment value, but they are not for us. In such books and plays the reader can't wait to get to the denouement, to the juicy bit, and as soon as the book's finished, he throws it away. This goes for English detective stories, French sex novels, and adventure thrillers.

This vicious kind of entertainment is easily achieved. Analyse a sex novel and the way it's

been put together; note how, once you've begun it, you can't put it down until the end and, once you've finished, you spit and throw it away, realising you've wasted your time. We need the kind of entertainment which is going somewhere.

Entertainment is above all an inner movement, a clash of contradictions and the modification of movement ensuing therefrom.

One should never devote the first ten pages to a portrait of the hero, giving his age and appearance, and saying what sort of person he is, and then let this hero begin to act. This method is wrong. . . . It's unentertaining, it's not good theatre, because it does not move on. It's static. The hero's portrait should emerge in the course of action, struggle, conflict, and behaviour. The portrait emerges from the lines, between the lines, between words: it develops gradually, and the reader can imagine it without any description, because if you meet the hero's portrait on Page One, you forget him, and you have to keep checking what he looked like—did he have brown hair, or red? It therefore follows that everything in a work of art must keep changing. Everything is condensed, and from this comes the special characteristic of stage time. Stage time is the stimulus of movement, and that is what good theatre is.

A work of art should grow with the artist who creates it. What does this mean? It means that the writer sketches out his characters, giving them words, actions, encounters. These characters begin to live. They begin to live a life of their own, so much so that they often carry their creator, the writer along with them. "Damn, I planned it one way and it's turned out quite different." This is very good, because it means that the work of art has become real, it has become infused with sap, it has acquired flesh, blood and life. This is when you arrive at genuine entertainment. In the full fever of work, I don't know what the hero's going to say in five minutes time, and I follow him with astonishment.

Take Flaubert's letters. They were put out by the State Publishing House as a separate volume. It's the perfect work of art, a complete novel, and more interest-

ing than any novel, because you follow the growth of a human being. You see him at ten, at thirty-five, his whole course through life is there in front of your eyes, its whole pattern. When he was writing *Madame Bovary*, he didn't know himself what was going to happen; he had to guess which way his little woman was going to turn. The novel was full of the unexpected.

It was just the same with Lev Tolstoi when he was writing *War and Peace*. It's beside the point that he had a mission—one cannot sit down to write without one—but there was no plan. He drew one up, then changed it, then turned the whole thing upside down and started again.

Next, of course, theatricality and entertainment are related to the very fabric of the work, that is to say, to artistic precision in expressing an image, when at a given moment a character cannot put it better, cannot improve on what he says. Economy in expressions is essential, economy in words, and no epithets. The epithet is a horrid, vulgar thing. Epithets should be used in fear and trembling, and only when they are absolutely necessary, only when you can't do without them, only when they give intensity to a word, when, to put it more exactly, the word is so worn or so common, that it must be emphasised with an epithet.

We've somehow got into the habit of enriching our language with epithets. But no one ever spoke such language, it never existed in real life and, what's more, it never will. Never lose an ever present horror of boring the reader. When you read Dostoyevsky's notebooks and letters, you are aware of that horror. Writing from Geneva, he tells how he drafted out eighteen plans in two weeks, how he suffered agonies trying to find an interesting and entertaining situation, how he had sent the first chapter to press, and was now in a dreadful state wondering if it mightn't turn out to be a bore.

And that, mind you, is Dostoyevsky!

It's an entirely justified horror which should haunt every writer, because without it you get the converse phenomenon: "Come now, my good fellow, I expect you to read everything I've written."

The reader has no desire to. They offer him a book in the library, and he says: "No, thanks, he's a bore. Anyway, why do I have to read him? Why do I have to chew all that cotton wool?"

Arrogance is a very unpleasant thing in the writer, and he must struggle against that arrogance, he must nourish a profound respect for the reader, and not for a single minute must he ever try to force his attention.

As I see it the same laws hold good in playwriting as in music. In music, these laws demand that a musical phrase should develop into a whole stream. The musical phrase develops in accordance with the laws of harmony and counterpoint.

In playwriting, these laws are essential so that the spectator can be held, his attention held, in order that the fifteen hundred people sitting in their seats in the auditorium may be transformed into a solidly welded collective, a single organism, which will live up there on the stage or, to put it another way, in order that the play may "come over". The spectator can never observe. The spectator doesn't go to the theatre to observe, to look; he goes there in order to live. And if he is to live there are laws to be observed. One of the basic laws is that the spectator must know everything, but the characters in the play should not.

The spectator must be cleverer than the characters and more far-sighted than they are. The spectator must be a sort of superior being, which is to say he must be one jump ahead. He knows in advance: "He does so-and-so." In relation to the spectator, the characters are half blind. They collide on the stage as we collide in the battle of life, and the spectator is a being for whom the future already exists, is there now, and is already known. When we go to see *The Inspector-General*, it isn't to find out what's going to happen to Khlestakov. We know perfectly well, down to the last word, what happened to the Inspector. We watch *how* it happens, and the more we know about the history and interrelations of the characters, the more interesting it is for us as spectators.

And so a play must be constructed so that the whole of the exposition unfolds as far as possible in the first act,

Once the spectator has taken it in and knows what it's all about, and what sort of plot it is, he can follow the characters. From that point on, there must be no surprises or deviations. The spectator knows and believes. This is the plot, this is the direction in which the characters are moving, this is the direction of their conflict, and this is how it must develop. Woe to the dramatist who veers off course, that is to say, deceives the spectator or draws a red herring across his path. The spectator shrugs, loses interest altogether, and the production at once becomes dull, superfluous, and trivial in spite of the fact that it expresses a magnificent idea. How many productions of this kind have been flops!

What's the reason for this? The spectator has been left in the dark about something, he is unable to feel involved in the play.

And so everything must be known to the spectator in advance and he must not be given any surprises. He must know that such-and-such a character is doomed and must die. This is one of the basic laws of theatre.

1933

MY CREATIVE EXPERIENCE AT THE SERVICE OF THE WORKING WRITER

When you are thinking up a historical novel, you are doing so, of course, because you feel an urge to write one. You can't just sit down and think—how about writing some kind of novel?—you must feel the urge to do so. And this urge results from a desire to understand the contemporary world. We are linked to our history by great threads. For the history of so great a people as that of Russia, 200-300 years are, of course, only two or three historical days, and so the roots of a great many contemporary matters (such as, say, our struggle with the kulaks) are deeply rooted in history and, in order to understand much of what is happening now, it is essential to look back into the past.

There is much about us that the West finds incomprehensible. The energy and will inspired by the Party in our country completely contradict the conceptions which have formed in the West about Russia and the Russian people.

They find it quite impossible to understand how it is that tremendous events of world significance are being achieved over here (for example, stratospheric flight, the rescue of the Chelyuskin crew, etc.). This could not happen in any other country or with any other people. It could only happen with us. It could only happen in our epoch, permeated as it is with exceptionally volitional principles.

When we look back into the past, we see that the intellectualism, the general laxity, and the Chekhovianism typical of the 1880s certainly did not flourish at every moment of our history. There were also moments of exceptional volition. Such a moment was the Petrine era. I am only saying this by way of example, since one can become interested in this or that epoch in different ways. A whole series of causes can make the writer take an interest in a particular epoch, in a particular segment of historical time.

Then work begins on the material. I am, of course, working on material of the Petrine epoch. There are masses of it—memoirs, historical documents, letters. But I don't consider it necessary to go through all the historical material available. What matters is to sift out everything *fundamental*, i.e., whatever confirms your interpretation of the period being studied.

And so you begin work on the material. You read through it. You make a note of the passages which might be useful, or which are of particular interest to you. Myself, I don't use the usual card index, I simply underline the passages I need and make a mental note of what I must find in which book. Then, when the whole area has been covered in reading, you concentrate on one period. You take a segment of time—six months, a year—you look up what has happened during that period, what events and what material relates to these events. I deliberately restrict myself. Let's say I'm interested in 1698-1704. Then I won't read what happened after 1704 or before 1699, except for general material describing general events: characters, mode of life, etc.

What is fundamental in a historical novel?

It is the emergence of personality in an era.

Most of the historical novels written up to the present time have taken personality as the motive force of history. Very often, a historical personality has acted independently of environment and could be fitted into any epoch without behaving differently.

This type of structure in a novel is wrong.

Personality is a function of the era, it grows as a tree grows on fertile soil; but, in its turn, a big and powerful personality begins to set the events of the era in motion. It may only move them within definite limit, but it can delay or accelerate them. Personality in history—this is a new thing in literature, because we are posing the question in Marxist terms. But the emergence of personality in an era is a big problem for the artist. In Part Two of *Peter the First*, which I finished quite recently, this problem is one of the fundamental issues.

A second task and equivalent to it, is to ascertain the motive forces of the epoch. Our history, in the form of memoirs, was written in the majority of instances by the gentry, for the gentry were the only literate class. And so memoirs and historical literature are one-sided. They took the era from the viewpoint of the landowner class, and colossal blunders were committed. For example, they completely overlooked and failed to mention the tremendous part played, in the first half of that era at any rate, by the young Moscow bourgeoisie. It was the instrument through which Peter transformed the age, and it was this bourgeoisie that raised the figure of Peter on its shield. That events subsequently took a different course is neither here nor there. There was a struggle, the young bourgeoisie was defeated, and the landowner-gentry class took over. To be more precise, there began a counter-revolution of the gentry which ruined the cause and held up the country's development for two centuries. The landowner class played a fatal role in the development of the country, a truly terrible role.

And so the ascertainment of the motive forces of an epoch is the second task.

The remaining tasks are purely technical. A historical novel cannot be written in the form of a chronicle, in the form of a history. Both are entirely unnecessary. What's

needed most of all, as in any artistic canvas, is composition, architectonics.

What is composition?

It is primarily the fixing of a centre, the artist's centre of vision. The artist-writer cannot take an identical interest, or have identical feeling, identical passion for his various characters, any more than the artist can have several centres in a painting. Let's say—a tree to one side; in the middle—a human figure; on the right—a building; behind it—a forest; beyond it—the middle ground, and so forth. All this cannot be depicted with identical precision, with identical representation of detail, or with identical intensity of colour. Every picture must have its centre. The centre is the meaning of the picture, its ideology. This is very difficult for the artist, naturally, but it is fundamental.

In my own novel, the central figure is Peter the First. The others, those who travel with him on his way, are portrayed according to their importance, with correspondingly less detail and clarity. There are figures who deliberately flit across with a mere gesture or word. An occasional figure seems interesting enough to merit a whole chapter. But here one has to take oneself in hand and hold back. The artist's feelings must not get the better of him, however remarkably interesting a chapter it might turn out to be. One must hold oneself in check, otherwise a gigantic excrescence will form, and though it may be of good quality, it will be an excrescence nevertheless. Here the artist must obey the promptings of his artistic flair, his sense of proportion, his sense of composition.

Composition must never be explained or made up beforehand. I would even say that one should not even draw up an artistic and detailed plan. The function of the plan should be performed by your own artistic purpose. And I would say that the more social this purpose, the better. A novel should be created according to the laws by which life itself moves.

Very often, however, the figures you have created begin to live their own independent lives. When it's the turn of a figure you know well, you begin to treat it as an old

friend. All you have to do is give a gentle prod here and there. "Where are you off to? Not that way, this way...."

When the writer reaches a point at which his characters begin to live their own independent lives, the lives of living people, he achieves the highest moment of creation. The author then knows that what he is writing is going to be the real living truth. This, of course, presupposes a great sense of composition, when you know that this or that mustn't be done because it is outside the scope of your novel, when composition encompasses the writer's whole being, occupying not just his thoughts and sensations, but his feelings as well. This feeling for composition can be acquired, it must be learnt, and it is achieved for the most part by learning from mistakes, from practical experience.

I therefore recommend young authors to begin their career with short stories. There are writers among us who immediately start off with big works. This is very laudable, of course; it shows us that we have something to talk and think about in the Soviet Union. But it is, on the other hand, a dangerous thing to do, since many young authors, once they are midway through a novel, forget what has happened at the beginning and lose their bearings completely; whereas, you must be in a position to glance over the whole work at any given moment. Everything must be clear to you. But in order to learn this, it is essential to begin with short stories, and short novels. Unfortunately, there are not many among us who start out this way. And so composition is first and foremost a matter of setting up the target, the central figure, and then of setting up the other characters who are grouped round this figure in descending order. It is exactly like the architecture of a building. Every building has its purpose, its façade, a highest point to that façade, and definite dimensions, definite forms.

A work of art should also have definite outlines.

Now let us proceed further. The essential part of work on a novel, and without which it is entirely impossible to write, is a point of view.

What does this mean?

It means that when you are writing about something or somebody, or when you are describing something, you must find an initial point of view, not in the metaphorical, but in the literal, sense of the word—a line of sight.

What is the source of this?

The writer.

You write about what you see at a given moment. You look down from a hill at the disposition of town or landscape. There's something in the middle of the landscape—a lake, a house, a factory, a forest. You can see them all clearly. Whatever is to one side is more diffuse; whatever is behind you, you can't see at all and so you don't describe it. Meanwhile, this is the sort of thing that you find with the young writers: you read and you think—this could never actually be seen in real life. That is what is meant by seeking an initial point of view.

Next, and what is rather more important, is the point of view of the character. You're describing, say, Ivan Ivanovich. He's walking down the street, but you know that he's in a sad mood. Since you're describing Ivan Ivanovich, you also describe the street through the eyes of Ivan Ivanovich who is in a sad mood, because you can't see any cheerful motifs in the street: though the sun may be shining, he will only be aware of fog, murk and slush.

Such is the character's point of view, absolutely essential for writing.

Moreover, it can shift from one place to another.

If you're describing a scene with two people, then you can look at the disposition of the various objects from one or the other point of view in turn, but you must inevitably look through someone's eyes. When you're writing a sentence, you must know and be fully and clearly conscious of who is looking, whose eyes are seeing, because to write "generally" is impossible. When you write from some general point of view nothing tangible comes of it. But once you've defined the point of view and begin to look through someone's eyes, the result is precise and three-dimensional.

Next, language. This question is, of course, closely connected with what I was saying about the line of sight.

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...How must language be created? What language should be used in writing? First and foremost, you must see what you want to describe, see it clearly, perfectly clearly, to hallucination. If you're describing Ivan Ivanovich, you must know his age, how he moves, the condition of his digestion (if he has gastritis, then his language and his facial expression will be sour). You must visualise all this, and not put pen to paper until you do; but once you do see it, then your language acquires precision. You will gesticulate with the gestures of Ivan Ivanovich himself.

And so I recommend all young authors to write aloud. All the great masters wrote aloud. A sentence spoken aloud will always come from gesture, but it must not be spoken in a monotonous tone of voice and it must proceed from vision, from the contemplation of that person: you speak for him, as it were, and in this way you find his state of mind. Then everything will be all right.

Two words about invention. In general, the more invention the better. This is real creativeness. But invention must be such that you produce an impression of absolute truth. You cannot write without invention. The whole of literature is invention, since life is scattered over planes, over surfaces, through space, through time. A man, let's say, during his working day or non-working day will say one sentence essential to his existence, and he may say another such sentence a week later, and he may not say a third until a year later under different circumstances, or perhaps not at all. You compel him to speak in a concentrated atmosphere. This is indeed the invention of life, but it is invention in which life is more real than life itself. Here's an example. Take some printer's type, make an infinite number of letters, fling them and scatter them about, and by the law of probability (there is such a science), everything ever written will be there—all words, all collected works. But you can't organise them

into a system, because for this you would need infinite time. If Pushkin had never actually existed, he would exist according to the theory of probability. Art is just the same: it takes scattered life, an infinite number of scattered objects, concentrates them, and you have a realism which contains more of the essence of life than life itself.

1934

THINKING CREATIVELY

From an Address "On the Art of Playwriting" to the First Writers' Congress

Very frequently, an image stimulates ideas and sensations in me, and the image is always the crowning climax of a process. This extraordinary and fundamental thinking process is omitted in the definition which claims that the writer thinks in images. For palaeolithic man—the one who bound a flint chip to a shaft with sinews and left magic drawings of beasts on the walls of caves—the process of thinking was probably different from our own. Hunting, work and the battle with nature, demanded familiar movements transmitted from generation to generation, and these movements, these gestures, repeated (round the fire in the cave, say), evoked familiar images in the brain of man. Before his gaze (directed into the flames) passed the shades of beasts, of foes; man gesticulated and imagined—the incorporeal doubles of life rose up in the smoke of the fire. That was magic.

Growingly complex labour processes demanded more precise definitions.

Gestures brought sounds in their train, and language was formed from sounds.

For us, thinking in images is only a part of creative thinking. If I am going to think solely in images, that is, in the representations of objects, then the whole infinite number of them, everything that surrounds me, will become a meaningless chaos.

I cannot open my eyes on the world until my whole consciousness has been gripped by the idea of this world; only then does the world appear meaningful and purposeful to me. As a Soviet writer, I am gripped by the idea of rebuilding the old and constructing the new world. It is with this idea that I open my eyes. I see the images of the world, I understand their significance, their mutual connections, their relation to me and my relation to them.

I am permeated right through with the powerful rays of that world, and each powerful ray ends in my brain as a sensitive point. I am linked with the world, with all gestures, mental and physical, and with my whole being I react to the conjunctions and movements of images.

I think in sensations, desires, impulses of the will. I want to burst in upon that world so that, guided by the initial idea, I may introduce my own corrections. Finally, like any living being, I strive towards fullness of sensations, and since I am connected with a world which is building justice, the fullness of my sensations is achieved in the search for what is good.

I certainly don't mean—I emphasise this—that creative thinking is imageless; that the writer, as it were, merely uses images to illustrate his thought.

No. The image forms naturally in this complex process, it emerges out precise and exact as a consummation of thought, much as the finished machine comes off the conveyer belt as a result of a thousand processes: from blueprints, from the gases of the smelting furnace, to the magneto spark in the assembled engine.

A LETTER TO AN ASPIRING AUTHOR

15th December, 1938.

Dear Alexei Fyodorovich,

Something has happened to you that very often happens even to experienced writers. Your material has been too much for you and you've lost your bearings. I can only give you one piece of advice: put off for a time your thoughts of writing a novel and use the material you have been studying to write an essay, a historical study. Then we shall see. In every creative work, including the historical novel, we value, first and foremost, the fantasy of the author who recreates the living picture of an epoch and makes it meaningful from scraps of documents which have been handed down to us.

In this lies the radical difference between the artist and the researcher. The scholar needs a chain of consecutive facts in order to tell us about what actually happened.

The artist has the courage, or the cheek—on the strength even of insignificant fragments—to write boldly and confidently about an era out of his own imagination and his own intuition. He can sometimes be wrong, but it doesn't matter. Only he never makes a mistake who does nothing, although this, indeed, is his fundamental mistake.

You ask: may you “cook up” a biography for a historical character? You *must*. But you must make it probable, you must do it so that even if it (the fiction) is not actually true, it could have been so nevertheless.

Second: is it possible to transpose a date? There are dates conditioned by the logic of historical events, by the logic of history's dialectics. These dates are the nodes of history, as it were. But there are also dates which are fortuitous and have no significance in the development of historical events. You may treat these just as it suits you as an artist.

Third: historical characters should think and speak as prompted by their times and the events of those times. If Stepan Razin starts talking about the primary accumulation of capital, the reader will throw the book into the waste-paper basket, and with reason. But the author himself must know of primary accumulation and bear in mind, and he must regard this or that set of historical events from that point of view.

The strength of Marxist thinking is that it reveals to us the truth of history and interprets historical events.

Fourth: historical design. This is the kingpin of the work. Documents often change the setting, veer off in another direction, and so forth. But, of course, the original design—unless it is radically misconceived—cannot be subjected to radical alteration.

Fifth: get a copy of Professor Novomberg'sky's *Word and Deed*. Finally: at the beginning of your letter, you write that you want to create a novel for the average collective farmer. Your design is wrong of itself. The artist must always aim for the heights. Whether he can make them or not is another matter. But to make it your

design beforehand to write an average work for the average reader means to condemn yourself to artistic failure in the design itself.

Send me your published stories.

Yours,
Alexei Tolstoy,

Flat 69, No. 122, Gorky Street, Moscow.

TO HIS SON

I'm diligently being the man of letters, i.e., I'm writing *The Year '19*. I seem to have found a style and form for this very difficult novel. Style and form mixed together are the reagent in which objects long since gone rotten, scraps of clothing, bits of events, the dust of time, rusty iron, thoughts that have become banalities, forgotten cries, shrieks lost in oblivion, sentences, kisses, curses, bloodstains and so on and so forth—all come to the boil and, to the incomprehensible, witch-doctor-like, but essentially meaningless, mutterings of the author himself, are transformed into a palpitating creation with all the signs of a living being, convincing in its presence, although fleshless. I'm busy with that kitchen now, smoking like a chimney. What will come of it, Allah alone knows, but he won't tell me, as I'm no Mohammedan. I've finished reading Volume Two of the *History of the USSR*, and I'm now bored, since I know everything, and as for what happens next—nothing's been published yet. You'd do well to study history yourself. You can do some hard thinking and get yourself extremely distraught.

THE ART OF THE FUTURE

Dear Comrade Dyachenko,

Art always arises where there is contradiction—it is either conflict itself or the reflection of conflict. Deep (Marxist) analysis establishes that at the bottom of all social contradictions, including the inner contradictions of personality, lies the class struggle. Of course, Shakespeare, Balzac, Lev Tolstoi and others hardly thought of class struggle when they were writing, and they didn't think about it because some of them hadn't even any conception of class struggle.

Meanwhile, we are rapidly approaching the state of Soviet society when for the first time in the history of mankind the structure of human society will not know of classes and class distinctions. And so your question is entirely apposite. What will happen to art then?

Mankind is still young. We have only traversed a small sector of the tremendous road that has unrolled before us.

A small part of this small sector is covered by historical science and belongs to the history of culture. This is the period of the class structure of human society (it can now be established that this period covers about 10,000 years). The art of this period has come down to us. But beyond that period, far back in prehistory, there stretches a road of no mean size, when human tribes had only an embryonic class structure. Nevertheless, this prehistoric period has bequeathed to us a tremendous art—fairy tales, songs, myths. The basis of this art is not class struggle, but the battle of man with nature and the cognition of the depths of the human soul.

This ancient art came to be replaced by the art of the times of class struggle. It arrived, vivid and full-blooded, along with metal weapons and improved production, along with the machine, the written language, ship-building, etc.

Likewise, in our own times the old social structure is being replaced by a new one (we have the good fortune to be its contemporaries), along with new tempos of life, new improvements in engineering, and new scientific achievements.

So why do you think that the new, the socialist era will not bring in a new art on the crest of the wave? Contradictions and conflicts will be transferred to other fields, but contradictions and conflicts will go on for ever. It must not be imagined that the classless society of the future will degenerate into a sated, mindless, complacent mass. The leaders and founders of socialism—Marx, Engels and Lenin—teach us that the classless society will be a world of unbelievably varied human creative development.

Struggle will continue, but its aims will be different.

The arena of the conflict will be the inner world of man, that most complex creature of genius, that phenomenon as yet hardly studied or revealed. The arena of the conflict will be the further mastering of the secrets of nature and further technical progress, which has no bounds.

And it seems to me that only now is mankind drawing near to the sources of a great art unprecedented in depth and power.

Art will become cognition. It will be enriched by philosophy and science. It will go out to meet the general consumer, who will be immeasurably more cultured and demanding than he is now.

Those are my views, such as they are.

Yours,
Alexei Tolstoy

1936

WHAT IS A SHORT STORY?

I'm speaking exclusively of my own experience. Let's suppose there is a certain quantity of accumulated material—observations of life, studies of history, etc. There is a purpose for which, and in the name of which, the material should be used. There is the creative urge. And yet all this of itself is not enough. A plot has to be found. Once successfully hit upon, the plot organises—sometimes momentarily, literally in a few seconds, like the drop of some corrosive reagent—all the chaotic backlog of thoughts and observations and knowledge.

A plot is a happy discovery, a find. And it can't be thought up as you sit at your desk in clouds of tobacco smoke with your eyes focussed on the inkwell. The plot always comes out of the hurly-burly of life, from the living conflict of the present day. A plot—and don't misunderstand me—is a popular anecdote, still damp and palpitating. It may not yet be clothed in verbal form and may not

be doing the rounds. But, once told, it will be understood by the masses; it is the key to the disclosure of some social contradiction. Such is its nature. The writer has to go out hunting for this multi-coloured bird of happy omen.

The plot, like any anecdote (let me stress once again—the anecdote, not as a play on words, but as an extremely condensed story about a collision of facts) cannot be thought of solely as cause and effect, as action and result, as a force applied to a given medium, with the ensuing consequences, etc. A plot must always have a comma and a “but”. A force is applied to the given medium, but this creates a counterforce, and there is an unexpected (or previously fated and fatal) result. The element of surprise or, in the other instance, of fatality, is the very essence of the anecdote, or the plot.

At the polar opposites of art, surprise engenders situation comedy, and fatality results in tragedy, either ancient tragedy (the struggle of the hero for a class doomed to destruction), or the tragedy of anticipation of revolution doomed to failure at a given stage.

The writer can deal with this captive bird, plot, in various ways according to the significance of the subject and the magnitude of the material and, finally, his own inner qualities as an artist.

The plot can be dropped in like yeast to ferment the large mass of the epic, novel, play, or story. The plot can be used directly in its pure form, or told as a colourful story, with all its social significance clearly pin-pointed.

In the latter case, we get the novella, or short story. Young writers are often contemptuous of this form as a minor one. Indeed, 19th-century world literature has given us many examples of the pseudo-novella. It's either a naturalistic slice of life, salted with some vaguely humanitarian or social resentment, or a shapeless lyrical prose-poem, the offspring of cushioned leisure (young writers often try their hand at this impotently dreamy form, I've even been guilty of it myself), or an urban, individualistic little tale, useless unless you happen to be studying the putrefactive bacteria of bourgeois culture. All these examples depreciate the true value of the novella.

. The novella came into being in the Middle Ages. The burgher, cooped up in the narrow little alleys of the township between the catholic cathedral and the feudal castle, made up little barbed anecdotes with which to needle the church and the feudal lord. These were the first harbingers of the Renaissance and the bourgeois revolutions. The novella-writers of the Renaissance gave these anecdotes literary form. The 17th century poured into them the hot blood of life and politics. They blossomed luxuriously in the play-writing of the 18th century.

The novella is a most difficult art form. In the long narrative, it's possible to mesmerise the reader with superb descriptive passages, witty dialogue, and all kinds of devices. But in the novella, you're wide open. You must be clever, you must be meaningful—the minor form doesn't liberate you from major content. You must be as brief as a poet in a sonnet, but your brevity must come from concentration of material, from the selection of what is absolutely essential. Architectonically, the novella must be constructed with a comma and a "but". It must be a finished work. The novella is the best school of training for a writer.

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WORD IS THOUGHT

(From a Talk)

I can convey in words not only ideas, concepts, but the most complex pictures in the most delicate shades of colour. It's as if there are thousands, perhaps millions, of keys in the human brain, and a man, when speaking words, plays with invisible fingers on this keyboard of the brain, and the music he plays echoes in the head of the recipient. Such is the complexity of language. Language is the highest culture of mankind.

Yet how do we treat it? Abominably. We sometimes treat it, to draw a comparison, as if it were a Stradivarius with which we were hammering nails into a wall. There's nothing to stop us doing this, of course. But what's the point? We very often treat language in this way.

It's wrong to think that language is simply a tool for the definition of concepts. By language, I mean the language of artistic prose, not the language of philosophy, the language of the science books, or of poetry. In

this talk, I'm concerned with the language of artistic prose.

In 16th-century Russia, it was considered that the literary language should in no way resemble that of the spoken language, and the further away it was from the common parlance, the more noble it was held to be. And so we read works of the 16th and 17th centuries, and they're very heavy reading, it's an effort to understand them, and they make no lasting impression whatever. We can read a few sentences with interest, a few thoughts; but it's not an artistic language, it's ponderous, difficult, with digressions, antiquated turns of speech, etc. Whereas the language of the people is different. We don't know the language of the people as it was in the 16th century, but we know that of the 17th century well from court records, from reports, from the works of the famous Archpriest Avvakum.

The language of the people is uncommonly rich, far richer than our own. True, there are many words and phrases wanting, but the manner of expression and the wealth of half-tones are much greater than our own.

This tradition of two languages—one literary and the other popular, one noble and the other base—persists to this day. Despite the fact that Pushkin—the founder of our literary language, the summit and the acme of the Russian language, the jetty to which we must all tie up—despite the fact that Pushkin brought these two languages together.

The position was that from the 15th and 16th centuries, the artificially created language lived on its own and the language of the people developed on its own, and this continued until the 18th century. At this point, the French literary language, and the German too, to some extent, but mainly the French, began to have an influence. Russian began to be written as if translated from the French. These two languages came together in Pushkin, and then separated again.

Turgenev was a great Russian writer, but he had a failing—he was out of touch with the language of the people. His use of words was brilliant, but he wrote in

a translated language, a translated language built on the laws of French.

I hold that the basic literary language is the language of the people, the language that the people use when they speak. Literary language should develop and be subjected to further refinement, we must have done once and for all with this tradition of two languages, the literary and the oral.

How is the language of the people built up? The sentences of oral speech? Man first and foremost sees what he is speaking about. But that is not all. When talking about something, he has a vivid picture of the person he is talking about, and once he imagines and feels him, he senses, as it were, all that person's muscular movements, all his gestures. When talking of a lazy man, he describes how he groans and lazily gets down off the stove. He will begin to talk in slow, lazy sentences. But he will begin to talk quite differently if describing a lively excitable man in a state of exasperation or fury. He will come out with short sentences, jerky phrases, which emerge from abrupt and sudden movements, from the gestures of the man he is describing. You must see what you want to talk or write about. If you can't see, you can't say or communicate anything, the result is unconvincing, and I won't believe you if you don't see what you want to talk about. You must feel the mental state of the man who is being described, or you must feel the condition of nature, if that is what you are describing. When you are describing rain, or dark colours, you will draw on one set of words. When you are talking about a hot day, you use quite different words and word-formations. You must see and you must feel what you are talking about. Language will then be the magic I have already mentioned, and that is when language will begin to play on the keyboard of my reader's brain. Hence, it follows that the use of clichés and banalities is poison to any language, to any people with aspirations to culture. The man who takes to using clichés and banalities is slithering down a slope, the very steep slope, I would say, of the twilight of his consciousness; he's not climbing the staircase of development, he's going down, if he takes to

such a cheapened smelling of language. It's very simple, one need only memorise a few dozen expressions and keep on using them. It takes no effort of will or intelligence to use these ready-made clichés. There are speakers who do this, and there are many of them. Give one of them seven minutes, and he'll put his watch down in front of him and talk fluently for seven minutes on a set theme. He has a definite number of expressions and three hundred words, and he spins them out from minute to minute. You listen, and you don't retain a single one of those words, they all go in one ear and out the other.

When you're writing a novel, imagine that all through the novel, the whole long book, you mustn't repeat the same expression, or the same epithet—ever. This may seem rather strange. There are five hundred pages in a book, so surely one or another expression is bound to recur? But it isn't. After all, nothing in life is the same; one moment is never quite like another. In any case, not during the course of our short life. Generally speaking, in infinity, in infinite space, everything must be repeated, even our sitting here must be repeated in combinations of material elements; sooner or later it's inevitable, that this moment will be repeated in its entirety as it is, and then it will go on differently in future variations. But we don't live in infinity, we live in a finite world, where nothing is repeated and, if we write, i.e., if we write what we see and feel, then not one single expression ought to be repeated. I, for example, know this about myself. I look and see that I've just repeated such and such an expression or such and such an epithet in such and such a combination. And that's bad. It means that either I've been dishonest there or here, and when I look deeper, I see that this is exactly the case. So how can one talk in ready-made expressions? It's vile, that's what it is and nothing more.

In literary language it's the verb that matters, and this is understandable, because all life is movement. If you find the right movement, then you may calmly go ahead and make up your sentences, because, if a man dismounts from a horse, jumps down from a horse, hops down from a horse, flops down from a horse, then all these are dif-

ferent movements which describe the various states of the man. So you first of all must seek and find the right verb, the one which gives the right movement for that subject. The substantive is that about which you are talking, and you must find its movement, then you must individualise it, and you must individualise it by means of an epithet. Here's a table, it's wobbly, it's a writing table, etc., a walnut table—that is a definition of the object, the individualisation of it. But there is more to the epithet than this. The epithet is a very serious thing, because, after the verb, it describes this (or that) condition of the object at a given moment. And so the choice of epithet is extremely important, serious, and decisive. But here you must be very sparing and not give two epithets, only one, because prodigality is not wealth. The epithet should illumine the object with the vividness and clarity of a photoflash which is so sudden that it seems to hurt your eyes. I've read things where these epithets were piled one on top of the other. Our inexperienced writers are very fond of doing this, thinking that the more epithets, the better. . . . The epithet should be used very sparingly indeed. Sometimes you can spend a lot of time puzzling over the choice of epithet, and, true, this racking of your brains is very rewarding. Note how Pushkin found his epithets. Look at his rough drafts and you will see how he sought for the right adjectives. We read: "Upon the shores of barren seas. . ." "the leafy-murmuring forests". No doubt he could have given a visual epithet, but he chose a musical one—"leafy-murmuring forests". Why? Here he deliberately avoids a sharply visual epithet and uses a musical one, in spite of the fact that the musical epithet often gives another picture. "Leafy-murmuring forests." Here, the epithet stirs the emotions, brings up memories. "Leafy-murmuring" describes it exactly.

About the sentence. It's silly to try and say how a sentence should be constructed. I have already mentioned that the sentence is taken from inner gesture. Here, for instance, is a sentence: "What a fool you are, brother." This is said by a man with no special desire to offend and such a remark could not upset anybody. But it's another matter if we put it like this: "You, brother, are a fool."

A different psychological movement, a different man talking to a different man. And merely because "fool" has been carried forward to the end of the sentence. And so the sentence is made up as follows: it comes from inner gesture, from inner state of mind. If I speak in my own right, I speak from my inner state of mind. If I talk about someone, about his condition, I must understand it and from this I must construct the whole sentence. A sentence must have a cesura, that is to say, a stress—the chief, basic word on which the sentence is built must fall under this cesura, or stress, irrespective of whether it is a verb or an epithet, just so long as it is the most important one in the structure of the sentence. This word must carry the stress, and on this word depends the arrangement of the other words in the sentence. This could be illustrated by a whole series of examples, but there's no need.

* * *

The Russian language is nearest to the language of the people, more so than any European language. Take French, for instance. Classical French is the language in which books were written and which all peoples studied, beginning with Molière, Racine, etc. The formation of the French language was a long and complex process. It was formed, first, from the Roman, the Frankish, the German, the Cretan, etc. It became literary very early, taking its structure from the Latin, and when you travel through France, you are impressed by the fact that wherever you go, children, old men, young men, women, peasants, bourgeoisie, workers—all speak one and the same language. Moreover, this language of the French formed under the influence of a literature that was very ancient. Was there ever a language of the people? Undoubtedly there once was, but it's hard to find now.

The German literary language is not very far from that of the people, but there are many dialects in that country—Lower Rhine, Middle Rhine, Upper Rhine, etc. They have an infinite number of variations, but there is one single literary language which has its traditions, and

very ponderous traditions they are too. Take a page from any novel of the mid-19th century. It's very heavy going, because you can read a whole page, turn over, and read another half-page before you find the verb, and that verb may have a negative in front of it, which means you've just read a page and a half about something that all comes to nothing. An incredibly cumbersome sentence structure.

Although there were many who strove to alienate the Russian language from the language of the people, to make the literary language an artificial one, the common speech is so strong notwithstanding, that it always displays a tendency to merge with the literary language. But there is no doubt that the Russian language is infinitely cluttered up and needs purifying. It can only be purified in one way—by drawing back into it forgotten words and forgotten expressions; or rather not forgotten, since they exist; but we have forgotten them, and they must be extracted, as far as possible, and extracted as it were for contemporaneity from the treasure-house of the Russian language and put into circulation. Let me give one example. At the beginning of the war, I started work on a romantic story *Ivan the Terrible*, and I studied the language in which Ivan the Terrible wrote his letters. At that time, there was a remarkable writer, the Metropolitan Makari; and there was the Archpriest Avvakum. I studied the language of letters and court records. While studying this language, I involuntarily began introducing it into my own literary turns of speech. All the articles which I have written recently for *Pravda* were written in the language of the 17th century. So this language is by no means dead, since it is of the people, and it lives to this day.

The Russian language must be purified of clichés and banalities, which as often as not are simply meaningless. This is the kind of expression you hear: in a pair of weeks' time, in a pair of hours. If you think about them, they're nonsense. You can have a pair of trousers, a pair of beers, a pair of horses when they are harnessed together; but when the horses are standing in their stable, a man will never say: "I've got a pair of horses." He will say:

"I've got two horses." How can there be hours in pairs, or weeks in pairs? One minute is not like the next. Incidentally, the German loves his pairs: it's a purely German thing. We also hear the expression "was able". Whether the expression is necessary or not, they say "was able". "He was able to bayonet two Germans", meaning he managed to do it somehow. People often use words or concepts out of habit and they never stop to think whether they are right or wrong. You notice this word, and you think about it, and it turns out that it's incorrect, so you substitute another, and the result is better. Then they say: "How well you write." And they read *Pravda* at the front and say that it's well written, it inspires, it gives the soul a lift. That's because you've thrown out the junk and substituted the living word, and the result is convincing. Then they say: "It went to the heart." What sort of word was it to go to the heart? It went to the heart, because it was the right word, and when the word is right, it pierces the brain like a dagger, and it goes to the heart. But this cannot be the case when a man lays about him with ready-made phrases and clichés. They only rattle like peas in a drum, and nothing remains of them afterwards.

The French writer Flaubert was sitting at home one evening in the country. A young man came to see him, the son of a woman he had loved. Some even say that the young man, Guy de Maupassant, was his own son. His visitor had brought him some stories. At that time, Maupassant was just beginning to be fashionable. Flaubert listened to these stories and forbade him to write, or, to be more accurate, forbade him to write for publication, and set him the following task: cross a certain square, walk round it, come back the same way and take one and a half to two hours over describing everything you've seen. He set this task as if he was a schoolboy. It was the best thing he could have advised Maupassant to do. After he had been writing for a year as Flaubert had suggested, he learned to see. I can assure you that if you set yourself such a task—go somewhere where several people are sitting, spend fifteen minutes there, and then write down everything you've seen—your first impression will be that

you didn't see anything at all; but this is only the first time. If you begin training yourself, you will learn to see more and more. After Maupassant had been training for six months or a year in this way, he wrote his famous story *Boule de Suif*.

Let me cite an instance as told to me by Maxim Gorky.

Maxim Gorky, Andreyev and Bunin were in Naples and, as befits writers, were sitting in a restaurant. I must explain that the previous generation of writers loved literature much more and talked about it all the time, as if in constant competition with one another. A certain game was fashionable at that time. If they were sitting in a restaurant and someone came in, they gave themselves three minutes to look him over and analyse him. Gorky looked and said: he's pale, he's wearing a grey suit, he has beautiful slender hands, and that was all. Andreyev looked for three minutes and then drivelled; he hadn't even noticed the colour of the man's suit. But Bunin had a very sharp eye. He looked for three minutes and managed to take it all in, even describing the suit in detail: there were such-and-such spots on the tie, the nail on the little finger was crooked,—he even managed to notice a wart. He described all this in detail, and then said that the man was an international crook. He didn't know why he thought this, but the man must be a crook. They then sent for the maître d'hotel and asked him who the man was. The maître d'hotel said that the man often turned up in Naples; he didn't know who he was, but he had a bad reputation. So Bunin had been perfectly right. And that's what comes of training the eye.

ADVICE TO THE YOUNG WRITER

Every one of us, when he writes well, is writing what he *wants* to. I must emphasise this. A work of art is born of the *urge* to create something, to write, and not simply because a man considers he ought to write something. This is the difference between the artistic impulse and the scientific impulse. Science is apprehension, experience, the sum of experience: it is idea, discovery. Art is the experience of personal life, experience as told in images, in sensations; it is personal experience which endeavours to become generalisation.

Each of us knows from experience that writing is a process in which you master your material, and, in so doing, you become master of yourself.

The writing process is always impeded by obstacles which have to be negotiated. There's always some difficulty to be surmounted. Nobody has ever found that writing came easy, that it "flowed" from the pen. Writing is always

difficult, and the more difficult it is, the better it turns out in the end.

How to overcome these obstacles? Only one thing can be said with confidence: of all the possible solutions to an artistic problem, you must choose the one which is the most interesting for you, the one which attracts you most.

In other words, you must check each artistic position against your own personal dislike. Do you object to writing this or not? If you object, or are bored, don't write it. The result will be bad and false. Only write when you want to, when you enjoy doing it. I say this, because the young and inexperienced writer often finds himself negotiating these obstacles to the creation of a work with revulsion, *without enthusiasm*. You musn't clamber over those obstacles in a mood of boredom, you must use your wings and fly.

Put this at the top of the page: art is that process of creating images when the artist himself is interested in creating, unusually interested, even more interested than the reader in reading. It does indeed happen that the writer writes with enthusiasm and the reader reads without it. This only means that the writer has no experience of communication, but he is nevertheless on the right road.

Art, like science, is the cognition of life. Science apprehends the truth by means of experience (guided by the idea of the scientist). The more experience, the more facts, then the more accurate the scientific deduction will be. If an infinitely large number of tried and tested facts were accumulated for a scientific research project, the conclusion would be approximate to the absolute truth.

For its own generalisations, art does not strive for experience in quantity. Art aims for the *characteristic* fact. . . . You meet someone, talk to him, and you feel that you can use this man to create a type of his era. Is such a case possible? Yes, it is.

Art, I repeat, is based on limited (as compared with science) experience, but it is based on experience in which the *certainly* of the artist, the "brashness" of the artist, reveals the generalisation of the epoch. When Dostoyevsky was creating Nikolai Stavrogin, the spiritual bankrupt

with no country, no faith, the type who, fifty years later, was to appear before the Supreme Court as traitor, vermin, and spy (I'm convinced of this), Dostoyevsky relied on notebooks less than on his own inner certainty.

I am certainly not saying that there is no need to observe life and no need to use notebooks. I am merely saying that you must not *observe without involvement* (just registering facts), but must *seek* in life the prototypes of your generalisations.

You ask on what basis, when you observe someone, you decide that this person is potential material for creating a type of the era. To be perfectly honest, I don't know. You can even make a mistake. But don't be discouraged. The psychic, intellectual and emotional apparatus of the artist has yet to be analysed, which it will be one day. Have courage and be sure of yourself. It seems to you, from your observations and sensations, that you are creating the type of the era. And if, in creating him, you don't falsify and distort, if you get off the ground, then in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, artistic success lies in store for you.

But if you plod along well-beaten pathways, smirking and smiling, shilly-shallying, throwing in the towel when things get too hot, keeping your ear to the ground and so forth, that's not art, that's commercialism, pernicious, rank commercialism.

The artist must be daring, he must be inspired by the great conceptions of the Soviet era. If mistakes lie in store, let him make them. Mistakes are a necessary artistic experience in the process of creating a great work. All of us need to harbour and nourish courage within ourselves. . . .

Only the literature of a people building socialism can rise to world heights. The courageous exploits of our revolutionary era should resound in literature as the courage of art. And resound they undoubtedly will, because in our country writers are loved by the people and protected by the Party and the government. Every year sees the further flourishing of the literature of the peoples who dwell in the Soviet Union. It is not for nothing that among the writers who are awarded official recogni-

tion, we find the representatives of many nationalities....

We must unleash our creative forces. We have all the material and spiritual possibilities for this. Any talent we have should be developed, and it will find its place on the printed page.

There are amongst you writers starting out, who might find it of some interest to follow the career of an older writer.

I should like to say a few things about myself. To tell you about my doubts, failures, despairs, joys, and so forth.

When I was fifteen or sixteen, I started writing poems. Bad poems. During the 1905 revolution, I wrote revolutionary lyrics, and they were nothing special either. At that time, I had not as yet thought of taking up writing as a career.

But I had always been attracted by the essentials of the creative process. Here's an exercise book, a pen, and ink. Something is possible, something is just out of reach, but it still won't come. You've only just begun turning your sensations, recollections, and thoughts into words, when it all melts away on the paper.

This went on for quite a long time. One summer in the Crimea, a certain poet was reading his own prose translations from the French. I was impressed by the vividness and precision of the images. I suddenly wanted to imitate what I had heard. I began with imitation, that is to say, I was now aware of a pattern, a path along which I could direct my creative powers. For the time being, however, it was not my road, but somebody else's.

The current of my sensations, recollections and thoughts moved on in this direction. Six months later, I hit on a theme of my own—stories of my mother and my relatives about the departed and departing gentry as they were overtaken by ruin. A world of eccentrics, colourful and absurd. In 1909 and 1910, against a background of advancing capitalism, before the war, when Russia was rapidly becoming a semi-colonial power, these eccentrics of the recent past rose up before me in all their majesty as types of the outgoing serf era. It was an artistic find.

I wrote my first small book, *The Trans-Volga Country*. Critics began writing about me a great deal. I decided that I was a writer. But I was an ignoramus and a dilettante. I had no real knowledge of the Russian language, or of Russian literature, philosophy or history. Nor did I know my own possibilities, or how to observe life. In self-justification, I must say that I realised all this and had a presentiment of what lay in store for me. And what lay in store for me was that my next literary efforts were to be inferior to that first "find".

And that's how it happened. After *The Trans-Volga Country*, I lost my bearings, hunted for a theme and a style, tried to observe life, but didn't yet have the experience or the proper equipment for the fruitful observation of life.

The result was a series of weak stories. I finished with reminiscences (apart from *The Trans-Volga Country*—the novel *The Gentleman with the Limp* and *The Eccentrics*), but I didn't yet have a feeling for modern times and lacked the ability to portray them.

I was only too well aware of my own helplessness. But I didn't know where to start in order to put matters right. At that time (1911-1912), we didn't have the thematic and ideological resources that you are given.

We, the young writers, were formed in times of profoundest reaction and the disintegration of the intelligentsia.

War broke out. Man's world was turned upside down. We were tossed about like corks on the waves. Young writers who had no real knowledge of anything except literary salons suddenly found themselves in the midst of the passions and the wrath of the people.

This was the beginning of our schooling, and mine in particular. Before me there unfolded a life in which I was no longer an outside observer staring through the window on to the street; I was right in the thick of things and I was confronted with the formidable problem of deciding what tool I should use to turn the unhewn blocks of life into the representation of it in art?

This same tool also had to serve for the formation of the self, since this process of art is always *dual*. The artist

grows up alongside his art. His art grows up alongside the people whom he portrays. The artist grows up alongside the characters he is working on.

What is it, then, this tool? In this case, it is the language spoken by the people.

It was then that I realised for the first time that I did not know the Russian language. Why do I write a sentence this way, and not that? Choose these words, and not those? What are the laws of language? What is the criterion here? The beautiful? But that doesn't mean a thing—the beautiful! An aesthetic criterion is a fiction insofar as it is detached from reality, from the life of the people, from its history.

I began studying the language of the Russian people from fairy tales, songs, the writings of *Word and Deed*, that is, court documents of the 17th century, from the works of Archpriest Avvakum. I began listening to it in real life. I began to understand the secret of language.

The French symbolists used to say that a thought can be expressed by one single phrase only and that one phrase must be found.

It's with these unique and polished phrases that the artist must operate. He should strive for those unique polished phrases, for a diamond language.

How to get nearer to that diamond language? How to find it? It has no laws. It has no grammar, and no grammar should be invented for it.

Yet this diamond language exists.

Human speech is the consummation of a complex spiritual and physical process. In the brain and body of man there flows an endless current of emotions, feelings, ideas and physical movements consequent upon them. Man gesticulates unceasingly. Don't take this in the crude sense of the word. Sometimes, gesture is only the incomplete or restrained *desire* for gesture. But gesture should always be anticipated (by the artist) as the result of spiritual movement. After gesture comes the word. Gesture determines the phrase. And if you, the writer, have felt and anticipated the gesture of a character whom you are describing (on the one indispensable condition that you must see that character clearly), then after the

gesture you have anticipated will inevitably follow the unique phrase, with the arrangement of words and the rhythm, which correspond to the gesture of your character, that is to say, to his spiritual state at a given moment.

From this it follows, first, that you, as writers, must always hallucinate, that is, teach yourselves to see what you are describing. The more clearly you see the creation of your imagination, the more accurate and true will be your use of words.

This is way to the creation of a diamond language. This is language of our people's folk-lore.

Second: the language of the people, the diamond language, always reflects the gesture of full-blooded movement, maximal movement, precise movement. Art cannot tolerate approximation, vagueness, uncertainty. And this is particularly applicable to our Soviet art. . . .

Language is created for each given moment at which the typical man in a typical background experiences the maximal intensity of feeling and produces the gesture, the movement (even if only guessed), that is expressed in the rhythm of this or that phrase.

Thus, language goes down to the deep social foundations of life.

How is one to hear this language? One must *see* it. This is a law for the writer—to create works by means of the inner visualisation of the objects he is describing. Naturally, you must develop in yourself this capacity for visualisation. You must work at it. How? By observing life around you, by mixing with people, by thinking, reading, and apprehending. And you must yourselves, with the greatest possible intensity, participate in the building of life. . . .

You must accustom yourselves to observation. Get to love it. Observe—always, and at all times, make generalisations, guess the past and the present of man from gesture, from phrase, and so forth.

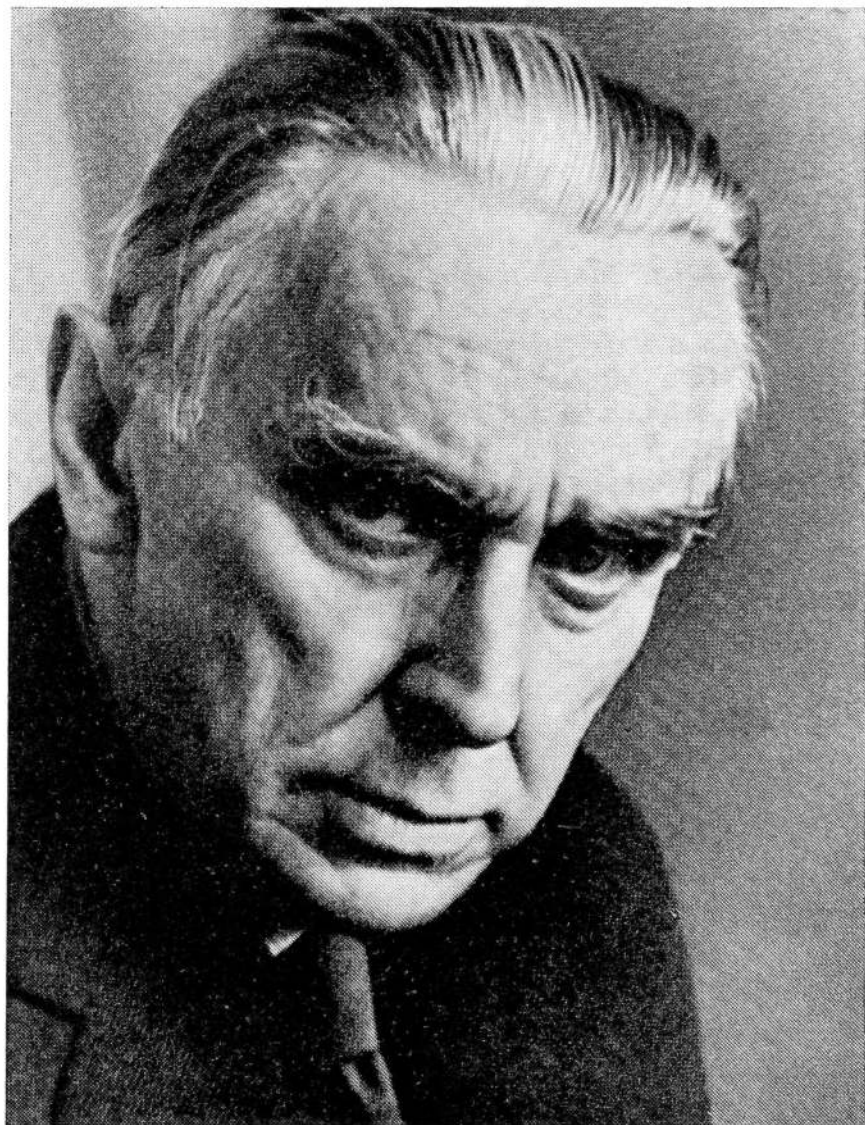
And so the artist, the writer, gradually accumulates an impression, and at a certain moment some encounter will give a stimulus to his assurance, his daring, and he will want to catch the type with his imagination. If

you ask him: Why do you think that this is the type of our era?—he will reply: Because I am sure of it, because I experience a profound artistic excitement. And, in so answering, he will be right.

How did I get my characters from the remote past to come to life? I think that if I had been born in the city and not in the country, I would not have known a thousand things from childhood—that winter blizzard in the steppes, in the outlying villages; Christmas celebrations, peasant cottages, fortune-telling, fairy tales, wax tapers, barns—all of which have their own special smell; I would probably not have been able to describe old Moscow as I did. The pictures of old Moscow evoked deep-lying childhood memories in me. And from this came a feeling for the age, for its substantiality. I subsequently checked those people and types against historical documents. The documents gave me the development of the novel, but the savours and the visual impressions from the depths of childhood memory, the subtle, almost elusive things so difficult to describe, gave substantiality to what I was describing. This is what national art is about—it is the smells of one's native soil, the native language, in which words have, as it were, a dual artistic meaning—that of today, and that which has been imbibed ever since the years of childhood, the emotional one, in words which taste, smell, and have the look of one's native land. And it is these that engender true art.

1939

KONSTANTIN
FEDIN



ON CRAFTSMANSHIP

1. A talk on the writer's craft should begin with language.

Language will always continue to be the basic material of a work. Creative literature is the art of words. Even as important a principle of literary form as composition must give way to the deciding significance of the writer's language.

We know of good works of literature in which the composition is inadequate or even bad. But a work cannot be good if the language is bad. You cannot build a good house with bad timber, although a good house is not always necessarily comfortable: it depends on the planning and not the quality of the wood. But what is the use of a comfortably planned house, if the walls do not retain the heat?

The pupil goes to learn from the master. The master teaches him how to avoid mistakes that he once used to make himself and of which he has since cured himself. He, too, had a teacher,

and what he learned from him, he added to form his own experience.

The pupil must do more than simply absorb his teacher's knowledge; he must add his own personal experience. Only then can he perfect and elevate his craft.

Science would come to a halt if the scientists were content simply to inherit from their predecessors. Discovery begins where the teacher's knowledge ends and that of the pupil begins. Remember Lenin: "To preserve a heritage in no way means to be limited by it."

So it is with art. To absorb his craftsmanship from a craftsman is not to become a craftsman oneself. One must absorb the past in order to go on more boldly into the future. But the past must be known thoroughly, if future efforts are not to be wasted on discoveries already made.

It is when the young writer adds new achievements of his own in craftsmanship that he elevates the art of literature.

But, for the writer, achievement is inconceivable without constant, I would say without a lifetime's work on words.

2. I am convinced that newspaper work is a very useful experience for the young writer. It's a training for which there is no substitute in literature.

What training does newspaper work give? It develops valuable qualities which are essential in literary prose: brevity of form, precision of expression, and clarity of thought.

The weakness of many recent novels is diffuseness and verbosity, or what Lev Tolstoi called "fat" as distinct from "muscle". Newspaper work develops the prose-writer's muscles. It doesn't allow prose to spread itself, to become diffuse. If a newspaper prints flabby prose, it's the newspaper's fault. But by its very nature, the newspaper demands of the writer what might be called good athletic form.

Verbosity is inimical to the newspaper, because extra words take up extra space and because they obscure the

thought; and the newspaper must only put forward clearly expressed ideas.

Precision in the use of words is not only demanded by style and healthy taste: it is demanded by sense. Where there are too many words and where they are flabby, then the thought becomes flaccid. Confusion does not lend itself to explanation in simple, precise words. When the prose-writer runs out of content, the result is long-windedness.

Mikhail Lomonosov, the first great teacher of Russian literature, said: "What is vaguely conceived is vaguely expressed." This was true in the 18th century, is still true of the 20th, and always will be.

Alexei Tolstoy, a contemporary of ours and a great Soviet writer, said at the height of his powers: "Language is the tool of thought. To treat language anyhow is to think anyhow."

A newspaper is a course of training in the observation of life. A writer working for a newspaper needs solid but adaptable ties with reality. A newspaper will not print a story about just anything, much less about nothing. A page in a newspaper is a day in our lives. But the newspaper certainly does not expect the writer to report the events of the day. That is the reporter's job.

The writer should disclose the inner life of contemporary man in brief outline, in precise action, and with penetration.

Gorky went through the hard school of professional journalism and was fully aware of the difficulties; but Gorky's stories were written for newspapers too, and he commented that this work had taught him a great deal. Chekhov, our amazing master of the short story, published his work in the newspapers for years. He proved unsurpassable in the short form and achieved world recognition as a writer of the short story.

A young writer, in my opinion, should begin his career by working on the shorter forms. He shouldn't start off by trying to write a big novel, a cycle of novels, or an epic in several volumes.

I realise that a young writer is quite capable of composing a novel and epic: he has plenty of energy and a

powerful urge to cram as much as possible into his first work. He has the temperament and he has the time. But the vast scope of the major epic, its wealth of characters and its abundance of words, its spaciousness, its countless manifold traditions, intersecting and giving the impression that the author is free to do anything that comes into his head—this alone is not enough to make the young writer more exacting in his approach to form.

It can be said only too often of the so-called “large canvases” of young writers: Yes, the canvas is large indeed, but what do we see on it? There is a lack of the harmonious composition that would help to clarify the resolution of the theme. The tie-ups between the characters are weak. There is no single source of lighting: every character has his own spotlight, trained on him, as in a film shot. The action does not develop from the character of the protagonists, nor the plot from the circumstances of the action. The large canvas has failed to become a great painting.

Craftsmanship is best learnt by first working on the short story, in which everything can be seen at a glance—the proportions of the parts, the organic relationship between characters and subject, the significance of each episode in the interests of the general design and of each detail in the interests of the whole. And a truly strict discipline in feeling for words. You cannot drivel in a short story. Words must be chosen with great care.

Training in the art of the short story does not, of course, open the way to the novel for every young writer. But I am convinced that every writer, insofar as he acquires mastery over the short form, will be that much stronger as a novelist. If he starts straight off with a novel, he will not make the demands of himself that he would have learned from practice in writing short stories.

I would say, after Lev Tolstoi, that knowing how to get rid of the “fat” and acquire “muscle” in literary prose is far more easily gained by the short story writer than by the novelist.

Why did the stories of Chekhov and Gorky, which

were published in newspapers and which have become part of the classical heritage of Russian literature, not disappear in a mass of dailies without leaving a trace behind?

These tales reflected life as lived in Russian society; they were generalised pictures of the various class relationships at the turn of the century. There can be no doubt of this.

But there can also be no doubt that these stories were written by great talents at the height of their powers. Chekhov and Gorky did not debase their artistic standards when they wrote stories for publication in the newspapers. They did not simplify their language, nor change their style, nor dwell on untypical characters, nor content themselves with hackneyed subjects. They remained faithful to the truth of reality and the truth of art.

A craftsman must always be a craftsman. It won't do to write well for a monthly and not so well for a daily. It's wrong to put all one's talent into a novel, some of it into a sketch, and none whatever into a newspaper article.

The writer must learn his craft in every genre, not just one. As soon as you pick up your pen, you answer for the whole of your art. If you're merely commercialising in the newspaper sketch, the article, the review, and the personal letter, you will never be a craftsman in the story and the novel.

The writer must promise himself once and for all never to write sloppily as long as he lives.

This also goes for grammar, punctuation and spelling. After all, you don't avoid making grammatical mistakes in an application to the Writers' Union, while allowing them in one to the Housing Co-operative. At school, you lose marks for mistakes in an essay on physics just as much as for those in a literary composition. And rightly so, otherwise the pupil will never learn to write properly.

Why is it that many young writers write sloppily when doing something for a newspaper? When are they going to learn craftsmanship? Not until they sit down to write an epic?

The writer should make it a golden rule to satisfy this elementary demand when working for a newspaper.

There are no "inferior genres", there is only an "inferior" attitude to genres. And when it occurs, it is the fault of those men of letters who consider it beneath their dignity to work always with the same passion, with the same intensity.

One should write for a newspaper to the very best of one's ability and in accordance with one's calling as a writer.

3. One often hears of language being spoilt by newspaper work, of the bad and even "ruinous" influence of the newspaper on the writer.

But why does the writer have to repeat the weaknesses and inadequacies of newspaper language and newspaper forms? Who decreed that he should? I realise that the overwhelming majority of reporters understand professionalism in their case to mean the habit of perpetuating the clichés generally accepted in reportage. But I am certainly not recommending the value of newspaper work so that the writer will be encouraged to go off and learn clichés.

To cultivate one's individuality as an artist, especially where words are concerned, means avoiding the distortions and mistakes allowed in newspaper writing and, consequently, raising the general standards of newspaper language.

The writer repeats the mistakes of newspaper language and says, "Oh how newspaper work degrades one!" But you must write so that your language influences the newspaper, not so as to give the newspaperman grounds for self-justification: "What's wrong with my style when it's been sanctified by literature?"

Yet our authors often write in such a way that you can't tell where the newspaper report ends and the short story begins.

A newspaper cannot always use living and picturesque language. The terminology of the office and the department is transmitted to the newspaper, is reproduced by it, and becomes part of its language.

It is interesting to note, for instance, how the press gradually got into the habit of the incorrect use of the plural, although it is repugnant to the Russian tongue.

They write: "The accused were granted the right to say their last words." But what court will grant the accused the right to say their "last words?" They are given the right of the last word, and that is all.

It is possible that the newspaper considers itself in duty bound to write like this: "The factory disposes of small production areas." But the writer has no such duty. So if he follows the newspaper and writes: "The collective farm achieved an increase in cultivated areas", it means he doesn't care what his style sounds like.

One can point to examples of language distortion which were conceived, not in the womb of some department or other, but in the editorial office. *Culture and Life* published a review of a certain periodical. In this article, the word "material" lost its inherent collective meaning and became a synonym of "item". With this result: "...about 430 materials have been published from special correspondents and TASS". Can it be that the author and editors of the review really think it would be correct to say that one material was rejected and five materials were accepted? Alas, the newspapers have all but legitimised this ugly expression.

The occurrence of linguistic errors in the press rests on the mutual absolution of sins. The writer turns a blind eye to the paper's mistakes, and vice-versa.

Recently, in an article of mine published in *New Times*, the editors replaced a word. In their opinion, a boa constrictor does not "gobble" its prey, it "gollops" it. Looking over the published text, I found this "correction", was momentarily exasperated, and then shrugged it aside. Was I right to let it go? I think not, because the editor will now be convinced that his dreadful "gol-lop" is good Russian and that he has done the writer and the readers a favour by interpolating it.

The Literary Gazette published an article by Alexander Chakovsky in which I came across the following: "The bridge, joining the two halves of the town divided by the

river. . . ." Was *The Literary Gazette* right in not correcting those "two halves"? I think not. Of course, Chakovsky isn't going to write "three halves" after this; but the newspaper backed him up, so that "two halves", whoever's fault it may have been, may find its way into some book of Chakovsky's as well.

We must make very severe demands on ourselves in our use of words, and we should never permit ourselves to make mistakes on the strength of newspaper language.

4. Recent criticism has observed that regional words and turns of speech have shown an increasing tendency to insinuate themselves into literature. Demands that the writer should preserve the purity of the Russian language are justified, except that pedantry should be avoided.

I remember one of my very first conversations with Gorky thirty years ago. He had just been reading some short stories by young writers and he opened one of them and asked: "Why write in a language nobody understands? What's *sklyanyi*? Or a *shirkunok*? The second might be a tool or a bird. They're not words, they're sound effects. They couldn't be translated into another language. No translator could cope. . . ."

Everybody knows Lenin's notes *Stop Spoiling the Russian Language*, in which he objects to the needless use of foreign words. But there are also some regional expressions that sound just as strange to the Russian ear as foreign words, and just as incomprehensible. In his articles, Gorky clearly stated his attitude to incomprehensible regional words, and the whole of Soviet literature shares his views.

In criticising the excessive use of local words, one must not, of course, fall victim to the other extreme of demanding the sterilisation of the literary language.

In point of fact, a word always owes its formation initially to some definite locality, to some definite region of the historically developing birthland of our speech. In the period of an already richly developed literary language—say, the 19th century after Pushkin, the general Russian vocabulary was supplemented by

regional material—and the local word was spreading, winning universal recognition, entering into general usage, and losing its regional characteristics.

Here is a noteworthy example.

A hundred years ago, Turgenev, when writing *Bezhin Mead* considered it necessary to put the verb *shurshat** in inverted commas and, moreover, add an explanatory note: “as they say round here—in the Orlov guberniya, that is”.

This means that in the first half of the 19th century the verb *shurshat*’ was not generally accepted in the Russian literary language. But since then, it has never entered the head of a poet, writer, or anybody else, to put *shurshat*’ in inverted commas, or to connect it with purely local and regional parlance.

Every Russian uses it now without hesitation. It is significant that in giving a phrase to illustrate the use of the word *shurshat*’, Ushakov’s *Colloquial Dictionary* quotes from Fadeyev.

The source of Fadeyev’s literary language was the living Russian language of the Far East. But now that the word *shurshat*’ is current from the Orlov district to the Far East (and it is used from Murmansk to Astrakhan), and since it has been part of the Russian language for a whole century, from Turgenev to Fadeyev, then this means that it has lost the local colour it had when Turgenev was a young man.

A word in circulation in a limited area of the country may justifiably become universally accepted and cease to be purely local, if the concept it denotes does not already have a more fitting and definitive equivalent in the language, if it is widely accessible to the understanding, and if it is not actually unpleasant to the ear.

The writer must not pollute the language with an excess of weird words, whatever reason he may have for doing so. But this stipulation does not exclude the use of a regional word when it is difficult or impossible to replace it with a known and generally accepted word and when it is apt and adds to the language.

* *Shurshat*’—an onomatopaeic verb meaning “to rustle”.—*Tr.*

For example, there is no need for the writer to use the Lower Volga South-Eastern word *shaber* instead of the general Russian word *sosyed* (neighbour). On the other hand, the local word *burlak*, meaning a barge-hauler, has long since acquired citizenship in the common parlance and in the literary language, and there is no substitute for it.

In other words, the writer's vocabulary can quite justifiably be supplemented with regional expressions when the use of a word from local sources is both justified and beneficial to the national Russian literature as a whole.

5. Why is it necessary to acquire a high standard of literary technique? In order to cover up for debility of thought and lack of ideas? Of course not.

Richness of thought and ideas requires, if it is to be conveyed in the best way possible, richness of form, that is to say, it requires craftsmanship.

Craftsmanship is the art of conveying the truth of life. It must not be thought that if the writer has a high standard of technique, then a false proposition as described by him will become true. A lie is still a lie, whether produced by a master or an apprentice.

When craftsmanship is not at the service of great content, it is a fraud. This is what formalism is—an envelope containing no serious inner meaning, technique for the sake of technique.

A high level of craftsmanship makes it possible to portray the inner life of a character with greater penetration and fullness. Truth and beauty of words, harmoniousness of all the elements which constitute form, have a powerful and profound influence on the imagination and emotions of the reader. But mere dexterity of words or mere external virtuosity leaves the emotions dead.

In an address to the All-Union Writers' Congress, Alexei Tolstoy referred to the malaise suffered by decadent writers as "a witch doctor attitude to words". This is very true.

A fair number of the older Soviet writers, myself among them, were in their early years more or less under

the influence of decadence, which had not yet quite exhausted itself, even after the October Revolution.

It is not difficult to understand Alexei Tolstoy's notion of a witch doctor attitude to words if we take the example of Andrei Bely. He surrendered himself to language like a witch doctor surrendering himself to autosuggestion. To him, language was a primitive phenomenon with a physiological life of its own. It was an elemental force—an elemental force of the tongue, and Bely himself called his writings glossolalia.* The wave of the sentence carried Bely's thoughts along with it, and the more refined and capricious the use of words, the more confused became the thought.

So babbling Baldies like a flash
Banding "Valdai's Boon" about
Re-burled it into balderdash. . . .

Such is Bely's verse in the poem *First Meeting*.

"Balderdash" prevented him from clarifying his muddled, moth-eaten, mystic world outlook in any way at all, and he has gone down in our literary history as an old witch doctor.

Word as an end in itself is, in the final analysis, meaningless, as any tool is meaningless if it performs no useful function.

The purpose for which we create a work guides our manipulation of the tool. Thought brings words in its train to give it expression and communicate it to people.

True craftsmanship does not cloud the essence of thought; it develops it like a sensitive photographic plate.

Hence, the craftsman acquires a working technical method of checking the value of a work. If you see errors in form, look for errors in content. If your taste as an artist objects to the representation of death in a novel, it means there was no death; that is to say, the writer did not comprehend it, did not feel it as an artist.

If you don't believe in a painted sunset, then there is no sunset.

What I mean by this is that his grasp of the real truth

* *Glossolalia*—the utterance, in an ecstatic state, of words devoid of meaning.—*Ed.*

stimulates the artist to seek for truth in description and makes for harmony between the two. The master is able to make a shrewd check on the value of a work by the presence or absence of this harmony. This act of verification requires more than just talent, it requires culture, knowledge, experience. And these qualities are only acquired by incessant toil.

It is essential to remember the main thing: "master" is not a title or a rank. When a writer becomes a master of his craft, he does not give up working on it. Craftsmanship has no terminus.

In his article *Shakespeare as a Playwright*, Goethe writes: "Not everything done by a superb master is done superbly well."

There are undoubtedly mistakes to be found in the works of the great masters. But these masters became great because they struggled with their mistakes as long as they lived.

The acquisition of craftsmanship is, of course, no easy task. Chekhov said in one of his letters: "The better a thing is, the more you notice its faults, and the more difficult it is to put them right." The experience of the great writers has shown that the master finds his work growing more and more difficult instead of easier with time.

But this labour is not only torment; it is pleasure, it is real joy.

6. It is important to make work a habit, to make it a need. The satisfaction of the need for work itself compensates for those "agonies of the word" of which much has been said and of which the writer knows only too well.

For some years, I was in charge of a prose seminar at the Gorky Literary Institute. I followed at length the work of many students, future men of letters and, for the most part, talented young people. I noticed that, as a rule, success rewarded those who wrote with difficulty and not those to whom writing came easy.

I can explain this quite simply: whoever strives to overcome the difficulties peculiar to the writer's occupation naturally finds it more difficult than the one who

tries to circumvent them. In the final analysis, the ones who write with difficulty come to make incomparably higher demands of themselves than those who write easily. Two types of writer gradually emerge—the profound and the superficial.

That is why it is essential, even in the very early stages, to make far heavier qualitative than quantitative demands on the young writer.

“Quality, rather than quantity” is a piece of advice not followed willingly by all. But those who take it soon realise from their own personal experience that it is sound.

I am particularly delighted that students who worked seriously and determinedly at the seminar not so long ago are already being accepted among the ranks of our young Soviet writers. Nikolai Yevdokimov, Boris Bedny, Yuri Trifonov, Yelizar Maltsev and other authors of tales, novels and sketches, have completed their literary apprenticeship in the post-war years.

Although young, they have already acquired their first experience of life in the heroic years of the Great Patriotic War, finished their education, begun getting published in the journals, and won the recognition of the reading public. Our country has opened up before them a spacious, far-reaching and brilliant future. This is a great deal.

Yet even at the moment of their reassuring success, we writers must tell our new comrades that even the highest popular appreciation of their work is not the acme of their achievements.

Yuri Trifonov made a good job of *The Students*, but he could have done better. He can work very well indeed, with determination and inspiration. He knows the meaning of dissatisfaction. He wrote good stories as a student, but was dissatisfied with every one of them. He doesn't begrudge hard work. His task is now to cultivate and develop further in himself a respect and love for hard work. More will be demanded of him soon, and he must raise the standards of his craftsmanship.

Yelizar Maltsev has already published two novels. The first was begun in the Literary Institute. The second,

Straight from the Heart, won well-deserved popularity for the up-to-dateness of its theme and the vividness of certain characters drawn from collective farm life. But some of the passages in Maltsev's second novel are not characteristic of his best, are weaker than his first novel, and are also weaker than certain stories read out by him when he was still at the seminar. Maltsev has also written some good short stories and has the ability to express himself concisely and construct his plot cleverly. But he is too carried away by the picturesqueness of words, is somewhat lax in his choice of them, and loves to show off with the glittering phrase. His novels are uneven, long-winded in places, and instead of painting he sometimes merely daubs. He must not rest on his laurels, but must marshal all his talents and abilities and use them for his future development and the enhancement of his gifts.

It is not, of course, merely a matter of working on the technique of writing, but of work of every kind and, above all, the study of life.

A student from the Literary Institute recently wrote to me from the Volga-Don Canal building project, where he had been sent by the magazine *Smena*. This is what he said.

"... In the past, I seem to have made a mistake common to those who write. Not knowing life at large, we assume that we don't know some particular area of life—the collective farm or the building project. Not knowing people at large, we assume that we don't know certain people: collective farmers, builders. As a result of this, instead of thinking about the people who are round us everywhere, and about life, which you can't get away from anyway, we make it our task to study the collective farm or the building project, and we go out there; and we go mainly in order to escape from thinking about life, under the impression that travelling about and observing can be a substitute for thought.

"I am trying to correct this fault. The trouble is that out of laziness or idleness I forget about this rule of mine and start looking, looking as hard as I can, letting myself get carried away and not really thinking."

This letter is indicative of a passionate and searching mind. There is truth in it, and there is error.

The mistake is that thinking about life can be a substitute for knowing it. This, of course, is not so. True and fruitful thinking is only the result of knowing life. Life cannot be understood unless it is studied.

What is true in the letter is that life cannot only be studied in separate compartments, in bits. To observe life and think about it means to be able to see the part without losing sight of the whole, distinguishing between what is fortuitous and what is fundamental.

Another true point in the letter. On a project like the Volga-Don Canal, it's only too easy sometimes to forget the business of generalising from the complex and majestic process of our life and to be completely carried away by the simple hero of labour who devotes himself to his work and to whom it never even occurs that he is accomplishing a feat of heroism!

In my opinion, this student of today and young Soviet writer of tomorrow is on the right road. He understands life, studies it eagerly, and realises that this is the main condition for achieving mastery as a writer.

Let other young writers show an equally passionate attitude to their work.

1951

NOTEBOOK

1. I once wanted to write an article entitled *The Sufferings of Old Werther*. It wasn't going to have anything in common with Goethe's young hero. I thought of taking for its theme the fate of a writer obsessed with his art. I intended to begin with the point that you should never take up literature with the idea that you can write just as well as "everybody else". That you should begin because you are drawn to art by the need to be yourself. That you cannot take pleasure in what you've written if it is indistinguishable from what is written by "everybody else". That at all times and in every way you should try to find yourself, your methods of writing, because you want to display your individuality to the best of your powers in all the elements of your art and your creativeness.

Mastery of his craft should not be an obsession with the writer. But for him it is the sole means of creating a work. You can't be a musician unless you master an instrument. You can't

go on being a musician if you give the instrument up. The gift of imagination is magnificent, but it is dead without the gift of speech, without the gift of the story-teller.

How to tell the story, how to write? That is the agonising, crucial, vital, and terrible question which haunts the writer. Morning, noon and night, in every manifestation of his being, the writer keeps hearing this question about his art: how to write? One cannot imagine a writer indifferent to the form of his work—such a man would be a freak, a monster.

Style has many components. The difficulty of mastering them is that they are devoid of absolute existence. Rhythm, melody, vocabulary, and composition do not live independent lives of their own; they are interconnected like chess pieces. Just as it is impossible to move a pawn without changing the position of all the other pieces on the board, so it is impossible to “correct” in a literary work the rhythm alone or the vocabulary alone without affecting the other components of style. When I cross out a word, I change the structure of the sentence, its music, its rhythm, its relationship with its environment.

But the basis and the soul of style is language. Language is the King on the chessboard of style. No language—no writer.

“If an author has no style, he will never be a writer. But if he has a style, a language of his own, then there’s hope for him as a writer. Then one can discuss the other aspects of his work.”

So said Chekhov.

I too would like to write of the joys and despairs of eternal labour on words, on style—the labour of the writer for whom literature is the business of life, an all-demanding and exacting calling. The writer’s obsessive love of words is a source of suffering, but of suffering that he will never regret. This is what was in my mind when I was preparing to write about *The Sufferings of Old Werther*.

2. A teacher once sent me some school exercise books picked out at a school literary competition. There was

nothing remarkable about them. But in one little boy's description of a journey to the Moon, I came across the following sentence: "We are now landing on the Moon."

I laughed a great deal over this essay, and once again it occurred to me that one should note down interesting expressions like this the way one collects regional speech idioms. Language is not merely a phenomenon of literary style. It is living speech; it is the science of words. We should save up our observations, we should generalise from them carefully, so that the life of language is familiar to us in its most subtle convolutions and caprices.

Wouldn't it be a good idea, I thought, if the writer had a notebook for all his observations concerning language? If he collected word-forms which ought to be discouraged and, alongside them, those which should be welcomed and encouraged?

About twelve years ago, I drew attention to the fact that writers in the press and in books were in the habit of using the word *kiosker*. Not long ago, it was joined by the word "sessioner". What is a sessioner? It's a chess player who takes on several games simultaneously. Journalism and literature pass by these mutilations without batting an eyelid. And then usage, as if in mockery, comes up with an innovation that sweeps you off your feet.

Moscow photographers' windows often display cards advertising "identisnaps". If you can have "sessioners", then why not "identisnaps"?

I once heard someone saying, "She's a querious old woman", about a woman who was always going about making inquiries. "Querious" is very appropriate, in my opinion! Then, suddenly, the awful word "combatability" gets into circulation.

The expression "as to" has been leading a rather strange existence over the past five years. It's as if it had decided to drive all other possible prepositions out of business. And it succeeded. A reporter writes: "The reader asks us to clarify as to the role of literature..." Another, "Disagreement as to the fact that..." Criticism studies "construction as to the Petrine era..." In a court report, we find: "A correction as to the fact that..."

In an article by a historian: "an attempt as to relieving the lot of. . . ."

Isn't it about time to bring to a halt this triumphal march of a hitherto altogether insignificant prepositional usage?

But this brings up another side of the question.

The time and the epoch are most often blamed for pollution and distortion of the language. But you often find that errors in speech which we take for new and recent were in fact current a long time ago. The authors of our literary classics, to whom reference is frequently made, not only furnish examples of purity of language, but evidence of mistakes which were common among their contemporaries.

Dostoyevsky himself is guilty of as familiar a turn of speech as: "The idea as to the fact that. . . ." In *Uncle's Dream*, Pavel Alexandrovich says: "As of the current day. . . ." And that dedicated master of style, Leskov, wrote: "A pair of words instead of an epilogue."

The writer, in my opinion, does not solve the problems presented by the living language. But he must listen to them, he must keep in touch with them. The writer's notebook should be a focus of the subtlest examples of linguistic change as reflected in the newspapers, in the street, in daily life. Language is the writer's element. If he is snatched from this element and does not gasp for air like a fish out of water, then he is not a writer.

3. All this particularly concerns young writers just starting out.

One of Brett Harte's characters points out to a young poet, that nobody asked him to write, so he ought to pay for the privilege of being published. This is very amusing. And very American. As it was in California then, so it is in some places to this day.

But not here. Or rather, our young poet has to pay, only not with money, but by working hard at his craft. And he has to pay dearly.

Last year, I was in charge of a students' literary circle.

In an anthology dedicated to Lev Tolstoi, I came upon

a striking example of Tolstoi's work as an editor. While preparing the second edition of *Reading Circle*, he noticed that a prose translation by Vera Mikulich of a poem by Victor Hugo was appallingly bad. Tolstoi picked up his pencil and began correcting Mikulich's prose without even bothering to look at Hugo's poem. I followed Tolstoi's pencilled script with beating heart. The whole of Tolstoi the artist was revealed with unusual vividness in those editorial corrections. He would strike out a whole sentence and replace it with one word. He would interpolate a completely new line. He would throw out various exclamations, interjections—all the rubbish and dust of language. Nothing was left of Vera Mikulich. He didn't bother with Hugo. He simply wrote a story by Tolstoi.

I was overjoyed at this miracle and decided to show it to the students. I set them a task: to explain why Tolstoi had rejected one line and substituted another, why he had scrapped certain words and, generally, what had happened in those four pages of mangled text.

The students did the task, but when they explained Tolstoi's alterations, I realised that they were only conscious of the formal side of the work and were doing the job without any sense of personal involvement.

Why? I think that many beginners in literature don't believe in the power, the force of style. They think they can present their ideas any way that suits them, and it doesn't matter which one as long as it's literate. But this is not so.

Here is a very vivid example from Boris Zhitkov. Describing the departure of a steamer in tsarist times, he wrote of a priest: "He went below with the Captain to sprinkle the three-thousand-five-hundred horse power three-cylinder engine with holy water." Marvellous! It would have taken anyone else a whole page, a whole anti-religious tract, to put across the ideas expressed by Zhitkov in one sentence. It was achieved by a single stylistic trick—a simple merging of engineering and ecclesiastical terminology.

What did Chekhov have to say about the power of style?

“Have you studied Tolstoi’s use of language? Enormous long periods, the clauses piled one on top of the other. But don’t get the idea that this is accidental, that it’s a fault. It’s art, and it comes with hard work. Those periods build up an impression of power.”

Young writers seem chary of studying the language and style of their work properly. If they start paying a lot of attention to words, are they afraid of being called purists? Or snobs? Or even worse? An infantile disorder!

This phobia has resulted in prematurely born manuscripts which make no sense at all, although sometimes the authors have a lively capacity for observation and could say much. But they debase the content of their writings with their own inarticulacy and prevent that content from coming over.

How often we put something down unfinished because of bad style! True, we do sometimes read bad work, but only on the advice of Jules Renard, who said: “We must read Paul Bourget in order to kill the Paul Bourget in each of us.”

In order to treat the sick, you must have a good knowledge of the healthy. But it is even better to know something about the disease. If the writer means to fight for the best possible use of language, he must be forever on his guard against the ailments the words are prone to.

THE FATE OF THE NOVEL

Address at the Leningrad Meeting of the European Society of Writers

Most of you probably know about the historic legislative act passed by the Soviet Government immediately after the October Revolution of 1917. A decree was promulgated in December of that year by authority of which the works of writers could be declared the property of the Republic. The substance of this act was dictated by the interests of society. It was necessary to make the more valuable literary works available to the general public. This was the first step taken by the revolution towards the future socialist culture, which at that time existed solely in the future.

We have acquired from the pre-revolutionary past the truly magnificent heritage of our Russian literature. The realist writers of the 19th century have gone down in our history as classics. The publishing house which received from the state the sole right to publish them began to issue, at very short intervals of time for that period and in incredible numbers,

works that were known to the Russian reading public. It now seems incredible to us that, at the height of the Civil War, at a time of famine, general want and disaster, it could have been possible to print with such self-sacrifice and devotion writers like Gogol, Dostoyevsky, the dramatist Ostrovsky and Lev Tolstoi. But print them they did; their inspiration was only heightened by the difficulty of obtaining even poor quality paper, and the more frequently the printing presses stopped owing to lack of fuel, the more determinedly they worked. Those poor editions of our old writers were the first rich triumph of the new culture. Young writers now look at them with emotion, as at the memorials of noble deeds. And our libraries are greatly concerned to preserve as long as possible the fragile pages of these books with the blurred print. Those pages are cherished like the heart.

All this actually happened, and it happened in the city where we are gathered today. Leningrad was subjected to blockade by the counter-revolution many times, and never once did it surrender. It is known as the cradle of the revolution. And it may be called one of the cradles of the victory over Hitler's fascism. For nine hundred days it withstood unceasing enemy bombardment from the air, from the sea, and from ground positions which the defenders could virtually reach by city tramline. The statistics of war will never tell us exactly how many hundreds of thousands of lives were sacrificed for the freedom of this city. And yet there has never been a time here when they did not preserve all of the old culture that has been handed down to us, and there has never been a time, however tragic, when they ceased to believe in culture or to continue building it.

Why do I say all this when the subject of the present meeting of European writers is the novel? Can one hope to obtain positive results from a discussion of the novel by relying only on the novelists' own conceptions of the novel? A discussion, however it may develop, comes down to the question of the place or significance of the novel in the past and the present. It can lead to a quarrel with

history itself. But even then, the novelists will only represent one side. The other will say nothing. But who is this silent party? Obviously, the reader, insofar as he is a part of history no less than the novelist.

That is why I began my address by talking about the first Soviet editions of literary prose, the bleached pages of which are vividly alive in our memory. When they were being issued, the idea was to give the general public a book which had previously not been easily obtainable. But that was not all. The main purpose was to encourage the rapid growth of a new mass reading public. It was a matter of increasing the audience.

The country lived by slogans. One of the most challenging was "Down With Illiteracy!" At the front, Red Army men sat down to their ABC's in between battles. There was a great demand for books. And books were in short supply. Representatives were sent from the remotest parts of the country to find them in the cities but, like the bread there, they were sometimes unobtainable. The life of the revolution was harsh and grim. But would we refuse it poetry, its inseparable fellow traveller?

It is now generally realised abroad as well as at home that we have long been a country of universal literacy, and that peoples who had no literature yesterday are today producing their own national novelists. The reading public has spread to include the entire population.

But to read is not merely to learn facts. To read means to cultivate taste, to learn to understand the beautiful. People with artistic potential are more likely to emerge from an immeasurably large public than from a narrow clique. That is how Soviet literature began about half a century ago. It emerged from intellectual circles working with the revolution more and more closely as the years went by—and from replenishments which the revolution itself mobilised among the workers and peasants.

The conceptual and aesthetic basis of the newly forming Soviet literature was the heritage I have already mentioned—the Russian classics. It is a heritage which is of inexhaustible inner wealth. And it has its own special historical characteristics. The literature of the 19th century confirmed a type of Russian realist writer, of whom it

may be said that he is not only a writer, but a "doer"—a man who makes life along with other men, a man who builds a universal human world, not an enclosed, private world of his own. Such was our tradition in the historical framework from Pushkin and Herzen to Chekhov and Gorky. The history of the West likewise knew writers who were also men of action. There, the framework was even larger, beginning with the precursors of this tradition in the 18th century (incidentally, this also applies to Radishchev in Russia), and extending from Voltaire to Hugo and Romain Rolland, from Lessing to Heinrich Mann.

It should be noted that these limits did not include Romanticism and other trends, among them the psychological novel, which won itself a high reputation, with Dostoyevsky as its leading exponent. As early as Chekhov's time, the beginnings of Decadence appeared in Russia. This signalled the end of the 19th century, when Russian poetry was the first to move into action against realism. The poets—those arms-bearers of sensibility—were ahead of the other literary battalions in taking their places in the vanguard, as soon as the forces of history began changing direction. The very threshold of the new age of Decadence was marked by the emergence of the symbolist movement. It acquired a certain finish and produced poets of distinction. But already by the decline of the revolutionary wave in 1907 it had split into two factions and then, over a period of years, agonisingly devoted itself to polemics about its own crisis. Two branches of the one tree—the aesthetes of individualism and the religious mystics—graced the cynical onslaught of tsarist reaction with their elegant internecine conflicts.

In the literary life of this vast country, it was realism that figured most prominently in the fifteen years or so before the beginning of the war in 1914. Gorky assembled for the anthologies issued by the Znanie Publishing House an impressive team of Russian prose-writers. Among them were Bunin and Kuprin. The mainstay of the whole trend was the democratic intelligentsia and the progressive city proletariat. The realists were the sworn enemies of symbolism in aesthetics and politics alike.

But symbolism soon found itself confronted with a new adversary. A year after the Italian Marinetti's *Manifesto*, futurism flared up (there's no other word for it) in Russia. This highly inflammable fuel provided a veritable firework display. No sooner had it come into being, than the new-born cult split up into cubo- and egofuturism. The first, calling itself antisymbolism, flaunted the slogan "Word Before Meaning". Experimentalism took the form of "nonsense" language, or "personal" language. The futurists deemed it necessary because the common parlance, in their opinion, "insulted" the artist's imagination with its very concreteness.

Such, in brief, were the literary phenomena in Russia from the beginning of the century to 1917. How do I see our literary life at a time when our people had left the fateful moments of history behind them and had confidently set foot on the road to a socialist society?

The Russian literature of the realists had at its disposal a foundation of the classics, with the prospect of the insatiable demands about to be made on the writers by the revolutionary masses. Symbolism, in its double aspect and with its affiliated branch of acmeism, was on the way out. The futurist fireworks were now giving off nothing but smoke. In the early Soviet years, futurism offered a multiplicity of minor schools which were easily graduated from, but which it would be pointless to enumerate here.

Insofar as the fate of any literary movement is determined, in the final analysis, by the writers in conjunction with the reader, realism carried the day in the contest. The public for the other trends and schools was much too narrow to continue supporting their refined existence. The demise of the various schools did not, of course, mean that the work of the writers who belonged to them was lost without a trace. One of the founders of symbolism, Alexander Blok, was destined to say things of imperishable value for the inception of Soviet poetry, and, talking of poetry, there was, of course, Mayakovsky, who began his stormy career with the futurists. Nor will Yesenin be forgotten, who paid his tribute to imaginism, announcing that "Word is Image"; nor Akhmatova, who

found herself in the very bosom of acmeism, with its "Word Is Thing" in opposition to symbolism.

The stormy battles of the poetic trends did not pass the novelists by. For the writer, the life of all the literary genres is part of a whole. But in the novel, these trends left practically no trace at all. Symbolism was the exception. But, to take an example, Andrei Bely saw his mission as a novelist in transforming his poetry into rhythmic prose with the same thematic material in both his poems and his novels.

Only at the very beginning of the Soviet novel is it possible to detect the influence of forms which were already on the way out. This influence was most noticeable, I think, in Pilniak's books, where Bely's rhythms alternate with Remizov's stylised tales. The same applies to Artem Vesyoly, who came to literature later—his prose is loud with the echoes of futurist versified sound-writing.

After the mid-Twenties, the revolutionary poetry, which had gained altitude first, was joined by the novel—the new novel which was to represent Soviet literature for decades at home and abroad. Its originality lay in its subject matter, drawn from the historic experience of the times. The attitude of the novelist to form rests on his acknowledgment of its derivation from the material he uses. Form is not a spare suit of clothes. Since the material of reality is incessantly on the move, the writer's expression of it in the novel must naturally also undergo changes.

Any dispute in the field of aesthetics must lead to a clash of world outlooks, because it is solely his vision of the world that stimulates the writer to select this material in preference to that for his work. The view of human society as a world intelligently organised by people corresponds with what I find in reality, and this reality enriches me by proving that I am right. When I have this proof, my work is already conditioned by the nature of the material extracted, and I see the form organic to it. The novelist with a negative view of life finds himself handling quite different material which dictates other methods of treatment. If human society is chaos, then how can we help but find in it a hero of horror, a hero

of despair, and what else can this lead to but a chaotic novel?

So far from imposing restrictions on the writer, the wide scope of true-life material, as encompassed by realism, allows him to draw on a multiplicity of descriptive means. Realists treasure tradition. They acknowledge the necessity for a diversity of artistic forms depending on the facts of the historical process and do not force the material of the new reality into old clothes. We call the realism of Soviet literature socialist realism. Life has changed. The revolution has affected everybody. And we are everybody. And our literature is everybody's literature, the literature of socialism.

The aesthetics of this trend is not a textbook on artistic technique. Technique is the business of master craftsmen. Each one evolves his own means of expression individually. The general development of literature, I would say, affirms word as idea and rules out any view of word as symbol only, or as sound only, or as thing only. It does not follow from this that words cannot have a great many other properties, but their basic property is always meaning. In socialist realism, this meaning is the humanity of the new world.

The stylistic individualities of the masters of the Soviet novel are manifold. There is, alas, only one possible means of promoting mutual understanding in international relations between writers—and that is translation. Explanations of the special characteristics of any literary movement are only a subsidiary means of getting to know it. Just as it is impossible to visualise a sculpture from a verbal description, so it is impossible to appreciate a novel from hearing it talked about. Many overtones are lost in the music of the Soviet novel if we cannot hear the actual voices of writers from the Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Georgia, Armenia, Lithuania, and our other republics. In order to provide a clearer picture of the range of Soviet literary prose, it would be necessary to enumerate many names of writers from both the older and younger generation. I will mention those who are best known to the European reader by virtue of their long-standing reputations and their distinctive individuality. Furmanov,

Alexei Tolstoy, Sholokhov, Leonov, Fadeyev, Vsevolod Ivanov, Ehrenburg, Paustovsky—here we have quite dissimilar artists, novelists who for the last forty years have carried the theme of Soviet man expressed in artistic images beyond the frontiers of their native country.

To sum up, I suddenly see what I have been saying as a rough sketch of the writer's biography. Autobiography, if you like. I keep hearing the crucial question that haunts the writer all his life: why write, and how? Where to go, and with whom? The choice cannot be made once and for all—it is a constant process, as it were, because the writer is continually accepting or rejecting from among the artistic phenomena by which he is surrounded. The contradictions of reality and the contradictions of its expression in art are not to be dealt with by formula. And if the writer once repeats a novel written by someone else or, even worse, by himself, he is no longer an artist. We have rejected what was unacceptable to us in the past and we reject what is unacceptable today.

Anyone who concludes from this that Soviet literature is proclaiming isolationism in art is wrong and is trying to argue us into the same error. I am prepared to repeat that the Soviet Union publishes more literary translations from foreign languages than any other country in the world. But it can be objected that it is a matter of what works are selected for translation. Of course, there is selection, but it is relevant to point out that there is no less selection done in Europe and the rest of the world.

Literature is now faced with an attempt to raise all over Europe the standards of the traditions established by Joyce, Proust, and Kafka. We reject this. We do not believe that, in the quest for originality, we should return to decadence of this order.

Our refusal to support any such attempt is not built on sand. Most people are aware that the collected works of Marcel Proust were published in the Soviet Union. If they did nothing to increase his reputation, it was not because of isolationism. And if the Soviet novel were to follow Proust's intuitivism, it would be logical to resurrect certain of our own modernists as well. I think that Joyce, too, is no mystery to most of our novelists. Kafka is prob-

ably known to less. I knew him from the Germany of the First World War, when Dadaism was just beginning to divide into German Expressionism and French surrealism. Since then, I haven't really sought out his books. Kafka wrote, of course, with great formal elegance, and he had his own personal truth to convey, but it was not a truth for more than an insignificant minority of readers. What is the point of insisting on the expansion of that minority now?

Once again, we come to the essential difference between the novelist answerable solely to himself, and the novelist answerable to everybody for everything he has done.

I would sincerely like to wish this highly significant gathering of the European Society of Writers every success in its debate on the novel and every success for the future. There is not a single genre in literature that has encompassed the human spirit so boundlessly or the human way of life so all-embracingly as the novel. A crisis of the novel? Every artist can experience a crisis—this is almost undeniable. But is this, or is it going to be, a crisis of the novel in general?

It may be that in many respects we will not find a common language. But in our search for one, we have a vast common ground—humanity itself, a concept which encompasses the entire world.

TOWARDS A DEBATE ON LANGUAGE*

1. The writer's duty is to fight indifference to bad work. The most effective weapon in this battle is the writer's sense of responsibility towards his own work. It isn't enough to say that such and such a writer is sloppy in his use of language. The writer must practise what he preaches and set an example of the correct way of handling words. Write a book without misusing a single word. This will be an effective contribution to the struggle for the cultivation of language as an art. It is worth remembering those remarkable words of Goethe, who is respected far too highly and read far too little: "*Bilde, Künstler, rede nicht.*"**

The only way to the creation of literature lies in the unceasing effort to create it. Speeches, however smooth and clever they may be (which,

* An abridged version of the text in volume IX of the *Collected Works*.—Ed.

** "Don't orate, artist, create."—Tr.

by the way, they usually aren't), do little to help matters. And yet the writer under our conditions often has to talk, to make statements and speeches. He carries a substantial share of other people's obligations, particularly those of the literary critic and the propagandist. How many times have writers spoken in public on various problems of Soviet literature? And in order to realise how feebly criticism is coping with its extensive tasks, it is sufficient to mention that the problem of the literary language has only been posed by the writers themselves (and partly by political publicists), while evoking practically no response whatever from the critics.

And so we have come to Leningrad for a debate on language with a minimum of baggage, without even a general conception of the problem, and even without having collected the appropriate literature published in our periodicals.

We must first note the rigid interdependence of creative writing and journalism. The remoteness of the literary publishing world from the newspaper editorial offices creates an apparent gulf between the two forms of writing. But they are directly connected. What is the difference between a journalist's sketches and a book of sketches by a fiction writer? The short story, which they are at present intending to make an item of literary expenditure, thrives in the newspapers no less than in books. There cannot be two approaches to writing, one for books and the other for newspapers. What the man of letters does with words is not missed by the journalist. There can be no doubt of the influence of so-called "serious literature" on the untold ranks of feuilletonists, sketch-writers, critics, and reporters. Conversely, a mistake of language repeated a thousand times in the papers is often picked up by the young writer, and a vivid expression happily hit on by the newspaper writer becomes current in "serious literature". One must not, therefore, underestimate the importance of newspapers in the struggle for the proper use of language, when there isn't a townlet.

or big factory in the Soviet Union without its own newspaper. "That's a newspaper blunder. What else can you expect?"—this kind of dismissal testifies to the unpopularity in literary circles of the problem of cultivating language.

How is the question of language in fiction to be formulated? To establish a correct approach to the language question means to establish a correct approach to the question of form.

Language is one of the chief components of form, which means that language, as a part of form, is a means to an end. This should be the basis of our approach to the question of language in creative writing. It is this, too, that distinguishes us from the literary morphologists, for whom words are independent material and for whom philological problems can be an end in themselves.

The language controversy, as I have already mentioned, is being fought out here almost entirely without the participation of the theoreticians and the critics. A disgraceful state of affairs.

The debate should be illustrated with actual examples from Soviet literary works, and these should be juxtaposed with examples from the newspapers, and also from the living speech. This would make it possible to get an idea of the various views and theories of the writers. We must undertake something of this kind, unless we want simply to mark time. Even if we initially draw on a limited amount of material, we are bound to see how the forces of the "traditionalists and the innovators" are deployed.

An accumulation of material would help us to reach agreement on the basic positive signs of innovation, and on the identification and birth marks of the "traditionalists". This is essential, because at present the writer who tries to discuss the precision and clarity necessary in the use of words is irrevocably relegated to the ranks of the "conservatives", whereas almost any incoherence of language has a chance of being granted official recognition for meritorious service to linguistic "innovation". On the other hand, without sufficient research material we run the risk of elevating the haphazard to the representative

and, in the end, operating with non-existent and invented categories.

When discussing innovation, we often measure it by degree of incomprehensibility. This criterion has been in force for a long time now, and its roots went deepest during the times of futurism and "nonsense-writing". If it's incomprehensible, it's new, and if it's new, it's good. Sometimes this is actually so. Gogol was an innovator in the use of language. His contemporaries considered him an innovator. But his literary enemies attacked him for the "incomprehensible" Ukrainianisms which he liberally introduced into his books. The fruitfulness of Gogol's innovations has been proved by the subsequent development of 19th-century Russian literature. At the beginning of the second decade of the 20th century, futurism announced its preferential rights to innovation, soon converting them into a monopoly. Collected works of Velimir Khlebnikov in five volumes have just been published here. The literary world is much indebted to those who helped to bring this edition out. The collected Khlebnikov admits us to the whole laboratory of futurism, especially the work done by this movement in terms of language. We can, and must, use material from Khlebnikov's writings in order to make a thorough study of futurism and arrive at the first scientific evaluation of it. Such an evaluation must inevitably admit that, despite the productive expenditure of energy in terms of rhythm, metre, rhyme and so forth, futurist poetry worked hard to no purpose and, for sterility, in certain respects, even out-does the impoverished nineties. Anyone who knows that big poem of Khlebnikov's in Volume One, which can be read from left to right or from right to left, like the word *kazak*, is bound to realise that many futurist works are of interest to the psychopathologist but not to the man of letters. It can be objected that this poem is an experiment, a poet's virtuoso exercise in technique. Agreed. But the trouble is that these exercises consumed a substantial part of Khlebnikov's powers as a writer. Play on words becomes a cult, and word becomes fetish—anything but a vehicle for the expression of thought or image. And so we have here before us a vivid example

of sterile innovation. Clearly, Khlebnikov's outgoings of cerebral energy have not been recouped, his talents have long been spinning uselessly in the void.

Khlebnikov must inevitably come up in any controversy about language. His books tell us much that is significant about inventiveness in the literary use of language. Moreover, they give the clue to certain claims by Soviet writers to "innovation at any price".

The urge to legitimise everything that in some way or other changes the form of language exists here too, and even the painless and peaceful demise of militant "non-sense-writing" never taught a thing to certain adepts of the compulsive neologism.

What is the danger of this attitude to language innovation? Simply that the opponents of "innovation at any price" are immediately joined by battalions of parasites who do not know anything at all about language, or who can't be bothered to pull any effort into it. The researcher who is going to study the problem of language in fiction must borrow examples from the work of the Soviet writer who concocts his books to a set formula which degrades vulgarity and bad taste. Too often under the guise of "mastering the heritage of the classics", we master the clichés of the Breshko-Breshkovskys. Such adherents of the "classics" should be given no quarter.

And yet the first duty of the Soviet writer is to study the literature of the past.

It won't do any harm to take a closer look at what has been happening over the last few years in the graphic arts—in painting, for instance. What is the position in painting with the much celebrated problem of academicism? The rejection of academicism in painting was once carried as far as the rejection of the study of nature. It was decided that it was enough to depict man diagrammatically, and that the problem was, to put it bluntly, whether it was possible to draw a man in two lines or even one instead of three. The study of nature was abolished as harmful academicism. The result of this sage experiment was that young artists were now unable to draw, and when the Academy of Arts was recently reorganised and painting classes were restored to the curric-

ulum, the senior students went to the first-year students to learn drawing. "How do you draw? Show us!" At the Kiev School of Arts, the anti-academic movement was so deep-rooted and flourishing that the affair ended in a court trial of the original "persecutors of the human form".

I don't believe in trials. I believe that writers who seriously and critically study the literature of the past, especially from the point of view of verbal mastery, should not be written off as "traditionalists". That the concept of literary "conservatism" should not be identified with an interest in the Dahl group of writers or with Dahl himself. That the battle against false word-forms should not be branded with the dubious stigma of "purism". It is convenient to mask a simple inability to draw with an obligatory injunction to depict the human form by means of schematic signs. What, then, lies behind the claims of men of letters who stigmatise "purism" and encourage "innovation at any price"?

One must be able to draw. Many genuine innovators in painting were fine "academics". If they had not been "academics", could they have been innovators?

One must be able to express a thought precisely and clearly. The inability to do this is sometimes camouflaged by deliberately complicated and confused language. The proponents of clarity of thought and language encourage innovation in the region of the comprehensible and reject innovation in the region of confusion. That is the essence of it.

But at present this standpoint is also known as "purism". What is purism, exactly?

In his time, Gogol introduced many neologisms into literature, and his achievement as an innovator in language was no less important than his complete renewal of subject matter. But read his *Declaration on the Publication of a Russian Dictionary* and see how many complaints, typical of the man of letters, he makes about the pollution of the language, about the "corruption of the plain, true meaning of genuine Russian words"! Does it follow from this document that Gogol was a purist? The struggle for purity of language does not of itself imply

a struggle against verbal innovations, against new words.

In our own times, words formed on the analogy of technical terms and built up from different parts of several words—for example, *Komsomol*—have become an organic part of the spoken and the literary language, have come to say, are inflected in accordance with all the traditional forms, and do not require special legal sanction from the guardians of linguistic purity.

The cultivation of good speech demands not only a good ear, but sound knowledge as well. Expressions such as “a pair of minutes”, “a pair of words”, and so forth, have been condemned as immigrants from the West. But that refined connoisseur of language, N. Leskov, wrote: “A pair of words instead of an epilogue” to his novel *The Disinherited*, and in a letter to Mikulich he talks about a “pair of days.” It would obviously be purism to insist on banning from circulation this far from attractive “pair” (with this proviso: it should not be assumed that the presence or absence of an expression in some literary authority should decide the fate of that expression).

But here is an excerpt from a note in *The Literary Gazette*: “. . .percentage remuneration inevitably encourages the kioskers to sell the more expensive serious literature. . . .”

This pearl of creation was produced by a special team of the late FOSP*. There are five names at the foot of the note; that is to say, five people working in the chief literary organ of the Writers' Federation agreed that it was legitimate to use the word *kiosker*, and the editorial staff of this respected organ did not see fit to raise any objection to the neologism. Would it be purism to ridicule, in front of all decent people, the five team members and, above all, *The Literary Gazette*?

I think I've made my meaning clear, and there's no point in giving further examples.**

The label of “purism” is used simply to discredit a re-

* FOSP—Federation of Associations of Soviet Writers.—Ed.

** In *The Literary Contemporary* No. 1, 1933, N. Kovarsky published his objections to my article on language in *Zvezda* No. 9, 1929. Both articles are being used as material for our debate.—*Author's note.*

sponsible attitude to the language, a refusal to permit sloppiness in literary work, and a desire to teach the writer to apply conscious effort in the choice of words.

To sum up:

1. The battle for the language is one aspect of the struggle for form in the work of art as a means to the correct solution of the ideological task.

2. The battle for the language should be fought by literature aided by journalism.

3. The scientific illumination of the problem of language in literature should be carried out by researchers using examples from Soviet literature in juxtaposition with examples from the newspapers and from the living speech.

4. In the controversy about conservatism, purism and innovation, material should be used from the works of contemporary men of letters who, while pretending to study the classics, are resuscitating the clichés of trivial pre-revolutionary *belles-lettres*. Material should also be used from the works of Khlebnikov, and from Soviet writers who perpetuate the Khlebnikov tradition by reviving his type of innovation.

It is not a matter of caprice, of inventing aesthetic problems. Not at all.

It is inherent in a word to express a concept. But it is not invariably inherent in it to express that concept in the best possible way. The decisive factor must always be quality. And the writer must remember that given two works on the same ideological level, the one in which the quality of language is highest is the one which is of the greatest value artistically. The writer must aim for higher quality. This is demanded of him by literature, by the reader, by the times.

1933

2. In his note *Scapa Flow*, Alexei Nikolayevich Krylov recalls a historical parallel to the scuttling of the German fleet in Scapa Flow—Admiral Nelson's order for the destruction at Naples of twelve Neapolitan (belonging

to Ferdinand I, King of both Sicilies) ships "...for any ship not under the English flag could be against England".

The note includes the following sentence:

"Nelson received aboard his flagship King Ferdinand, Queen Caroline, the famous Lady Hamilton and her husband Lord Hamilton, put the Neapolitan nobility and Ferdinand's ministers aboard the other vessels, hung Admiral Caracciolo* as a farewell gesture, on the fore-topsail yard-arm of one of the ships, [evidently earmarked for destruction, i.e., left for that purpose in the Bay of Naples.—*K. F.*] and departed for Palermo."

The stylistic marriage of calm narrative prose with the marked abundance of technical terms—"on the fore-topsail yard-arm" instead of the usual "hung on the yard-arm"—is, to my mind, absolutely brilliant!

There's such irony in it, such humour, and at the same time such matter-of-fact seriousness and precision that, I think, it would be hard to find anything anywhere near as brilliantly effective. It's remarkable that the emphasis is not on the Admiral of the Fleet's treatment of another admiral: the executioner and the victim could both, no doubt, appreciate the serious and matter-of-fact humour of so opposite a technical detail: "on the fore-topsail yard-arm". It is quite likely that the English admiral used these very words in giving the order for the Italian to be hanged.

If I didn't know Krylov's wit and amazing feeling for words, I would say that the expression about hanging the Republican Caracciolo "as a farewell gesture" was an Englishman's, for it epitomises all the characteristics of English phrasing: matter-of-factness, verbal economy, concealed amusement.

But Krylov was richly endowed with all these attributes, and many more into the bargain.

His language is a model of Russian style at its finest. Krylov writes briefly, with the precision of a scientist and with Pushkin-like clarity of thought. He is exemplary and irreproachable in his use of metaphor. He can use

* *Caracciolo, Francesco*—head of the Neapolitan Republican Party, which was prepared to give Napoleon a sympathetic reception in 1798.—*Author's note.*

a scientific and technical term in such a way that I, without knowing that term, will unfailingly understand it and—most important of all—will be able to visualise what is being described. One example of this is his notes *On Wrecks and Disasters at Sea*. Take, for instance, his story of how the Cruiser *Kuban* sank in dock at Libava. It is a classic study of marine engineering language, a language of equal appeal to anyone familiar with the technicalities of the trade and to the uninitiated reader; that is to say, it is a model of a popular style of writing as yet beyond the scope of our popularisers.

Krylov must be included among those non-professional writers from whom the man of letters should learn Russian and the art of style (Ilya Repin is another example of the non-professional writer).

I first read Krylov some time ago—it was N. E. Felten who showed me his notes and articles in *Torgovy flot* as far back as the twenties. But it's only recently that I've come to appreciate Krylov properly as an expert in the Russian language and as a stylist.

Also important is the question of the excessive use of technical terms in literary work, something of which the man of letters is not infrequently accused by the critics. But what really matters is not whether too many or too few technical terms have been used in a novel (if its theme deals with engineering, science, and so forth). The point is in what way these terms have been used—whether or not they interfere with the reader's appreciation, whether they need additional explanation, or whether the work has been written so that all the terms are easily understood and only add to the instructional value of the novel.

Krylov teaches us a great deal in this respect, although he is not a novelist.

In the summer, I decided to "attack" the use of the verb *dovlet'**. In the autumn, a letter was published by

* *Dovlet'*—1. *To someone or something*. To be sufficient for someone or something, to satisfy. 2. Recently, cases have been occurring of the incorrect use of this word in the sense of "to weigh down on someone" or "to have a predominating significance in something": (possibly owing to an erroneous confusion with *davlenie* [pressure]). *From the entry in Ushakov's Dictionary.—Tr.*

Gladkov, in which he suggested that the word *dovlet'* should be "abolished from Russian literature and the living speech as not suitable for the Russian language". At first, I wanted to support Gladkov, but thought better of it, chilled by his tone: "exclude", "abolish", "not to be tolerated any further...". This is the language of the censor, it is not a language for a discussion of language. Then there appeared on the 11th of December, 1951, in the same paper, an article by Academician Vinogradov in answer to Gladkov in which, incidentally, Gladkov's demand for the abolition of the word *dovlet'* in our language was indirectly invalidated.

Vinogradov's approach is basically correct: of course, to define the correctness or incorrectness of this or that use of a word is the task of stylistics. But to say which science should concern itself with such a definition, or to say that it is a task of stylistics to decide whether one "should or should not paralyse and delay..." the historical development of the Russian language is, in effect, to say nothing whatever.

In practical terms, the question, as before, can only be settled by deciding whether or not to use this unhappy verb with the meaning which many attribute to it.

If Vinogradov personally, and I, and Gladkov, and others, find it unacceptable (as Vinogradov admits he does) to use the expression "*dovlet'* over someone", then what is the point of referring to the fact that "leading experts in the contemporary Russian language do not despise this word" as Vinogradov does, quoting examples from M. I. Kalinin and N. S. Tikhonov? Who is more correct, Vinogradov and Gladkov, or Kalinin and Tikhonov? The whole historical analysis adduced by Vinogradov goes to show that he and Gladkov are more correct, but the final conclusion is in favour of the "leading experts". And so it transpires that the Academician personally refuses to consider himself a more leading expert than those who use what he regards as an "unacceptable" form. . . . But why does he find it unacceptable? Is it really only a matter of subjective taste? And this in a scientist who writes that "style must weed out moribund and obsolescent phenomena in the system of the contemporary

language"! Well, weed them out, then! Only not "according to taste", but by demonstration, as is expected of a science, so that it will be quite clear whether you desire to "paralyse" or to encourage the use of an expression which is historically incorrect, but which is not moribund and is current even among the "leading experts". One or the other. But Vinogradov sits on both sides of the fence.

This is the point: in what circumstances should we legitimise and regularise a change in the meaning of a word as a result of that word's "historical development", and in what circumstances should we "paralyse" (!! its development, "delay" it, claiming that the change of the word's meaning is illegitimate?

Why has the metamorphosis in the meaning of the verb *dovlet'* become law?

What are we to do about the change, or rather substitution, that has happened before our very eyes in the living speech to the adverb *obratno* which means "back" but has for some reason come to mean "again"?

Is this a result of "historical development" or simply an incorrect word-usage which has spread like an epidemic, infectious, like every fad?

At what point will the philologist accept this mistake as "law"? Suppose the "leading experts" of the contemporary language start using *obratno* in that sense? . . . Will this use of the word become correct and historically legitimate? . . .

I have often asked myself, how is one to "paralyse" or stop an incorrect word-usage which has become widespread in general practice? Is it in the power of the independent scientist, writer, or newspaperman to do this, if a hundred million people are all speaking incorrectly?

But: 1) all our population is literate.

2) Schoolteachers, editors, and the proofreaders in hundreds of thousands of editorial offices have access to the Ushakov dictionary.

3) The four volumes of the Ushakov dictionary are an academy, a university, a science!

So why should it not be possible to influence the masses under the circumstances? What excuse is there for not mastering speech practice, for not making it more rational and more organised than it was in the old days?

But our own editors devote far too little time to the study of their own language. We are too casual about our Ushakovs. The academic world itself is guilty of much vacillation, referring to language "experts" who have never regarded themselves as experts.

And the millions go on creating their own speech, as they created it in olden times, making their mistakes "legitimate", and ignoring the scientists and the world of science.

Grammar is created on the basis of word-usages, on the basis of the language which is alive at the moment of its creation.

But time passes, and grammar becomes canon. Word-usages change, the language renews itself.

The contradiction between established grammatical standards and the new living speech intensifies.

Someone (or something) has got to give way to someone (or something). Living growth cannot give way to canon.

What matters is that in our time we consciously (organisedly and on a scientific basis—that is to say, on the basis of considered experience) take part or, to be more exact, want or would like to take part in building up the language, in its development.

HOW WE WRITE

The Author's Answers to a Questionnaire From the Journal *Problems of Literature*

Questions

1. At what age did you start writing, and when do you consider that your career as a professional writer began?

2. When do you begin your working day?

How do you arrange it? How long do you spend at your desk? Do you write by hand, or do you use a typewriter?

3. What is your attitude to the writer's scribbling pad, notebook, or diary? Do you consider them necessary, or do you consider that it is enough, when writing, to draw on the ideas as they occur?

4. When working on his novels, Zola kept a personal dossier on each character, working out the plan of the whole project in the minutest detail. How do you go about it? Do you have a plan of the book as a whole, plans of the chapters, plans of separate episodes? Or is the work built up in the process of writing, with the characters coming to life and behaving according to their nature and convictions?

5. How, in your opinion, can and should the Soviet writer learn from Russian and world literary classics?

6. What use do you make of the riches of the popular speech, folklore, riddles, proverbs, fairy-tales?

7. What are your views on one writer helping another? Do you consider it possible for a writer to "poke his nose", in Gorky's words, into a fellow writer's manuscript? How do you help young writers?

8. Should it be necessary for a writer's personal behaviour to conform with what he preaches in his writings?

9. What did the 22nd Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union add that was new to your personal interpretation of the writer's duty?

10. Your immediate creative plans.

Answers

1. 1910; between 1919 and 1920.

2. About ten in the morning.

My arrangements are haphazard.

From twelve to sixteen hours a day.

By hand. Always by hand. And only by hand.

3. I respect notebooks and envy those who use them all the time.

A jotter is a luxury. I make my notes on any scraps and sheets of paper which come to hand. I'm curiously stingy with good paper.

Since diaries are only of interest to those who ought not to look into them, they've gone out of date.

Alas, if the ideas that come into one's head at work were sufficient, there wouldn't be any literature. But the most important part comes at the writing desk more often than not.

4. I'm always drawing up plans and then breaking them in the course of work.

Non-living characters don't exist. They're living characters because they're free to act as they find necessary and possible in the predicament into which the author puts them or into which they land of their own accord. They mustn't be pushed in any direction.

5. He should learn from them. And he should do some-

thing over and above what he's learned. That's a must!

6. I make use of them. But I can't "embrace the unembraceable".

7. If I'm better at something than somebody else, then I am prepared to help, if the other wants me to. I've got my nose so much to the grindstone that it costs me quite an effort to tear myself away. I give my books everything I've got. But I can't give more than that.

8. One should behave well.

But one must know superlatively well what is "bad".

Without yeast, the dough of art won't rise. The holy fathers bake unleavened bread.

9. The Congress reminded me that I have not paid my debt as a writer to society and it still has to be paid!

10. I've had a long life and I wouldn't want to make all my plans "immediate". But which am I to begin with, when there are so many?

WINDOWS OPEN WIDE

The Author Talks to Critic Y. Oklyansky

It would be very interesting, Konstantin Alexandrovich, to discuss a subject which no doubt concerns everyone who writes and thinks about literature. I mean the importance of material in the creative work of the writer.

In controversies about the writer's grasp of reality, the words "material" or "real-life material" are given different interpretations. By no means every fact of life as observed by the writer can serve as material. The only real material for the artist is what he has experienced, felt, and reflected on. Hard thinking is not enough. A syllogism is constructed by logic but is verified by life. In the same way, feeling, arising out of experience, must wait for the cementing action of thought if it is to become suitable building material for a work of art. From my childhood days I remember an old man dying in the street, in Saratov. He was sitting on a bench, waiting for a horsebus. Suddenly he started slipping down, twitched, and it was over. Half an hour later, the

seat was empty. The sun was shining. Except that some women were standing nearby and talking excitedly. From what they were saying, I learned what had happened... and that empty bench has remained in my memory ever since. I felt a queer, detached sorrow for the old man. But detached, that's the point. I hadn't experienced the impression of death. Material is born out of the depth of one's impressions. The deeper they are, the more probable it is that they will subsequently become material for the writer. In this, the world of feeling is very important. Feeling must fix the impression. If it lives in you, then it is material for the subsequent work of the imagination. Everything is postponed, everything lies in the storehouse of the memory; but there comes a time when it is summoned to life and is organised as a planned work, a time when it is transformed by the imagination.

What are the writer's sources of material? Not long ago, there were some discussions around the concept of "the study of life". What interpretation do you give to this concept?

The most important source of real-life material is one's own personal experience. Tolstoi gained so much as a young man from his Caucasian and Sevastopol impressions that, other works apart, he was able to draw on them for *War and Peace*. If Dostoyevsky had not been condemned to death and then to penal servitude and exile, he would clearly not have written much of what he did. A great deal depends, of course, on who the writer is and what events he has actually witnessed or taken part in. The minds of the generation of Soviet writers who saw the Second World War were chock-a-block with war material, all their feelings were conditioned by war. And most of Hemingway's works seem to be autobiographical.

There is also another way of accumulating or gathering material; this is when the writer consciously searches for the impressions he needs. Hence, travelling assignments. This kind of experience ties in with one's professional work. Everybody knows about Lev Tolstoi's visit to the field of Borodino. This was not just a study of the locality,

but an imaginary participation in the fateful battle of 1812.

A consecutive series of phenomena enables the writer to transport his accumulated impressions through time and space. It often happens that the imagination is struck by phenomena which have not been developed and fixed by nomenclature. Count von zur Mühlen-Schönau in my novel *Cities and Years* is a typical fascist. I already saw the beginnings of fascism in Prussian militarism during my four years in Germany (Spring 1914-Autumn 1918), and could, if necessary, transfer some of these impressions to, say, the forties.

The more or less continual drawing upon a clearly defined circle of real-life phenomena and problems gives the work of the writer a consistency of subject matter which is not, of course, necessarily exclusive to him alone. For instance, people of my generation who began writing during the revolution "carry" with them something of the old intellectual. We come across this interest in the "old 'uns" to a greater or lesser extent in Kaverin, Pautovsky, Tikhonov, and Leonov. The intellectual with his baggage of pre-revolutionary upbringing is disappearing from life and, as a character, from literature.

What would you say about language as material for literature?

Language is an instrument, a tool of the writer and, along with all that he has lived through, reflected on, and felt in life, it is an object, it is material for creative processing. I have already had the occasion to say that language always remains the basic material of a work. Writing is the art of words. Hence the importance to the writer of studying the verbal wealth of the people.

Let us take a specific example—the representation of what is known as local colour. Authors are in the habit of going off into an imaginary city and imaginary places in order not to confuse the reader with too many inaccuracies. This is sometimes unavoidable. No one is going to bother me if I write that on the Liteiny, in Petrograd or on the Rue de so-and-so in Paris . . . this or that happened. But if I write that, in times gone by, in a small

town, or even in old Saratov, there was a demonstration on such-and-such a street, then they'll be sure to start pestering me with corrections and complaints. Historical accuracy becomes more and more of a problem, the more specific the characteristics of the locality described. In my novel *No Ordinary Summer*, I transferred a kulak uprising to the imaginary village of Repyevka—in actual fact, similar events took place in other parts of the Volga Region, where the local kulaks savagely slaughtered Soviet people (I was present at the burial of the victims of one such uprising on the town square in Syzran). . . .

The locality of the action may be invented but, in the dialogue, the writer must still adhere to a definite "geography". Attempts to write in some sort of "average" language will fail to achieve what is most important of all—artistic detail and verisimilitude. After all, language is a firmly fixed world of the objects, ideas, and concepts by which people live. In different regions people have their own distinctive characteristics, and their Russian is by no means identical. The old Volga, for instance, had its special words—*galakh**, *belyana***, *nosak****, *sarpinka*****, and the like. In the first two books of the trilogy, where the action is centred mainly on the Lower Volga and in the town of Saratov, I found it essential to find a language which would not allow the Volga people to protest "But we don't talk that way!" When collecting material for *The Conflagration*, I familiarised myself with the ethnography and dialect of the Smolensk country; but even before then, I had already lived in the Smolensk countryside and become accustomed to the local idiom.

All the material of a work, all the experience of the writer, is expressed by and through language, and so polishing is the hardest part of the job. In the early editions of my novel *The Brothers*, the ice on the river Ural was broken, in my version, with a "crowbar" preparatory to

* A tramp.

** A log-raft.

*** A porter.

**** Gingham.

spearing sturgeon. Someone in the Urals sent me a most tactful letter on the subject, as a result of which, my face red, I deleted the crowbar and replaced it with a pick.

The result of a writer's study of life is what is usually termed his artistic grasp of reality. As applied to what has taken place in Soviet literature, it has frequently been observed that a writer's artistic grasp of reality is lagging behind his political grasp of reality. Here is a typical example. Early in the twenties, certain Soviet writers stood on perfectly solid political ground. During the Civil War, they took up arms in the fight for Soviet power; yet artistically they were behind the times. Instead of full-blooded portrayals of Communists, they produced "leather jackets", etc. Such charges were laid, notably, against your Cities and Years.

What is your attitude to this problem?

In my opinion, it's a mistake to draw such a sharp line of demarcation between the writer's artistic and political—I would put it more broadly—ideological grasp of reality. This is the aftermath of the over-simplified views at the root of which probably lies the conception of a work's ideological basis as being rigidly set beforehand. But it is a single process. There is an extraordinary fusion here, and one must first answer—what is "aesthetics", and does it not contain an ideological principle? Is it possible that the writer's philosophical convictions should not be part of his aesthetic conceptions? Ideological and aesthetic principles are inseparable. Take the mystical and symbolist trends at the beginning of the 20th century. It would be wrong to think that the mystical views formed first and the aesthetic principles only afterwards. In actual fact, they grew up side by side and fused together. I was brought up in a religious home, learned the ritual of the church, was familiar with its history and, as a student, had to study divinity. If I had known *only* this, could I have possibly developed into a realist writer? The views instilled into me at home and at school were at variance with my studies of the natural sciences and the humanities and were at variance with reality. And so instead of acquiring artistic tastes that reflected a religious education

I absorbed the views of the materialists and the art of realism. It's all fused together. Accepting definite ideological principles, the writer evolves definite aesthetic tastes.

And now, about those "leather jackets". Such people actually existed at that time. This fact produced in literature a conventional system of representation. But, there were other revolutionaries and other people too. There was Lenin! But for superficiality of literary portrayal, the blame must be put on the writers' thinking, on their inability to grasp the characteristics of the epoch, and not solely on sluggishness of creative ideas, if such sluggishness there was. Incidentally, the importance of the "leather jackets" in the literature of the twenties is often exaggerated. By no means all the literature of the twenties was about "leather jackets".

Does the nature of the material affect the genre of a work, its form, etc?

If we allow that the characters portrayed move the pen of the writer, then material also affects genre. It's a matter of attitude, as when a journalist arrives on a much-praised building project intending to write favourably of it, sees an entirely different picture, and writes a critical article instead. . . . There's a short story of mine, *Affliction*, about a little man. I made an attempt to write a novel using similar material. It was my first effort at the novel as a form—it was about the Cossacks of the Urals and what are known as the "out-of-townners". It was a very weak novel and I scrapped it.

I would like to refer to examples from your current literary work. How are you progressing with Book Two of your novel The Conflagration?

Novy Mir is publishing this year Book Two of *The Conflagration* that is, several chapters on Tula and Moscow. Then there'll be a gap. Of all my works, only *Sanatorium Arcturus* and *Early Joys* were published complete. Almost all the rest came out at intervals. In *The Conflagration*, the action extends from the beginning of the war to the expulsion of the Germans from Yasnaya Polyana. The Germans held Moscow in a pincer grip. The liberation of Tula and Yasnaya Polyana was an important

strategic moment. We began to force the pincers open. The result of the defeat of the Germans near Moscow was a break-through in the consciousness of the army and the people. To me, historical events are only a necessary background. What matters most is people. Their psychology transmits what is happening round them. Especially simple folk. A big part was played during the war by the heart of woman, and not only at the front—nurses, traffic controllers, signallers, etc.—and, in the family, in the rear,—the mothers. During the blockade of Leningrad, the women showed more physical “staying power” than the men—something, evidently, that lies in the depths of the female psyche and increases her powers of resistance. I think about this too in my war novel, in which the battle scenes don’t take up much space—after all, I’m not a battle historian. . . .

In the creative work of a writer, what has been done in literature before him is taken into consideration one way or the other. In The Conflagration, one feels an attention to the tradition established by the author of War and Peace, and especially to the philosophical conception of the epic. If I am not mistaken, you have already written or spoken about this yourself. It would be interesting, in connection with this, to know your attitude to Soviet literary works about the last war—what has attracted your attention, and what, if anything, do you think ought to be discouraged?

At the present time, more and more memoirs are being written. This is a genre which has been lying dormant, or even hibernating, for a long time. General Gorbatov’s memoirs are interesting, for example. I had the pleasure of knowing him personally. I met him on the Orel front. The position is more complicated with fiction, although talented authors and books make their appearance. Of the books published in recent years, Vera Panova’s *The Fellow Travellers* is outstanding, very intelligently written, and evidently based on personal experience. She’s altogether very gifted (*Seryozha*, for instance, a short novel, is superb). V. Nekrasov’s *In the Stalingrad Trenches* has the ring of authenticity and is written with talent. Some very good war books have come from E. Kazakevich and

K. Simonov (especially his latest novels) and others. But a cursory enumeration of names and titles can only give a very small part of the picture as a whole.

I've been dissatisfied, and still am, by the portrayal in some of our war books of characters purely in terms of their heroic behaviour. As a phenomenon, heroism is extremely complex, and the artist should give not just behaviour, but should disclose the sources—moral, social,—of the act of heroism. Heroism displays itself unexpectedly in war, and it is sometimes difficult for a man to imagine how he would behave in a given set of circumstances. Here, the force of example plays a decisive role. When everybody else is forging ahead, it's easier to get up under a hail of bullets.

The heroic in our novels is too often depicted in a very trite sort of way, and the heroic actions of the characters are accomplished without motive, or are stereotyped. Yet the portrayal of heroes in great literature is very complex and many-sided. Pierre Bezukhov's heroism is actually rather silly (when he attacks the French patrol in Moscow). But Nikolai Rostov's is traditional heroism. Both are heroes, yet when they meet, they fail to understand one another. And so there are personalities in classical literature who are more real to me than some of my acquaintances. Raskolnikov, Protasov—both are personalities. Our contemporary novels should also create personalities who will stay in the memory. Konstantin Simonov has done a great deal towards this: his Serpilin is memorable, and his Sintsov too.

There is in your trilogy a person who is always behind the scenes of the action, but who is one of the most significant characters in the work. I mean the image of Lev Tolstoi, who now and again disappears into the depths of the consciousness of the playwright Pastukhov, and then appears to him in his imagination during moments of difficult decisions, or "comes to life" for the reader independently of Pastukhov's experiences. Would you tell us, Konstantin Alexandrovich, even if only briefly, about the "material" which determined the occurrence of the theme and image of Lev Tolstoi in the trilogy, especially in The Conflagration?

In 1910, I was an eighteen-year-old graduate of the final class of a commercial institute in Kozlov. Lev Tolstoi's "flight" and death were something which I felt very deeply. Kozlov (now Michurinsk) is on the same railway line as Astapovo. What happened there shook the most diverse levels of Russian society, of the people, to the core. The earth tremors that accompanied the last living step and the death of Lev Tolstoi were felt keenly in our little town because of its proximity to Astapovo. To me, the death of Lev Tolstoi was a personal shock.

Artistically, I came to accept and understand Lev Tolstoi somewhere near the beginning of the forties, when he became for me the supreme authority, even somewhat supplanting Dostoyevsky, the idol of my youth. Shortly afterwards, I began visiting Yasnaya Polyana. I particularly remember one of my first trips there, in winter. There was a savage frost. I was met at Zaseka station by a sheepskin-clad coachman of Tolstoi's times. Sophia Andreyevna's grand-daughter, also named Sophia Andreyevna, was waiting for me in the house. A room had been set aside in Sophia Andreyevna Senior's half of the building. Everything was kept as it had been when the master was alive; they hadn't even laid on electricity. The cook, who had served Tolstoi, brought in the supper—milk and bread—by candle-light. At night, I could hear the silence. There's no silence like it anywhere else. A fantastic silence. And there was an amazing atmosphere of concentration. I spent six weeks there in Yasnaya Polyana, and finished *Sanatorium Arcturus*. After that, I visited Yasnaya Polyana many times.

But the Tolstoi theme in my novels was not inspired solely by these writer's reminiscences and literary attachments. The plan as a whole was determined by the time of the action of *Early Joys*—1910. And would it have been possible, depicting the Russian intelligentsia of that time and the lives of people in the arts, to overlook such an event that year as the death of Lev Tolstoi? The actual pictures, of course, were prepared to a great extent by old memories. In *Early Joys* the atmosphere of the events, taking place at the time of Tolstoi's death is reminiscent, but the incidents are invented, although not all to the

same degree. The newspaper correspondent actually did send in the news of Tolstoi's death—this is a historical fact which I once experienced, and it was woven into the texture of the novel.

In my conception, historically substantial motifs again brought the Tolstoi theme to the foreground in *The Conflagration*. In 1941, the same people as in 1910 were still alive and active alongside my new characters. And this situation led the author to resolve the theme which he had opened in *Early Joys* and intended to conclude in *The Conflagration*. But the "image" of Lev Tolstoi in *The Conflagration* is not just the "voice" of the writer's conscience, which often troubles Alexander Vladimirovich Pastukhov, and it is not just a conception of the mission of the writer.

I have already mentioned the forcing open of the German "pincers" round Moscow in the decisive months of 1941. The military operation at Tula had great moral and historical significance. I was attracted by Tula, because there, as in the Civil War, everything was critical, as in the revolution, everything was at stake. To be or not to be? One distinguished general, who was in charge of the defence of Tula in 1941, gave me the following detail. Tula was almost cut off. The Defence Commander rang Supreme Command H.Q. "The Germans are bringing up fresh tank units! We've got nothing but bottles of fuel mixture! Send us anti-tank equipment. . . ." H.Q. answered, "Message understood. Hang on! We're sending everything we've got!" And they sent 14 anti-tank rifles. It was all that the country could let them have at that critical and decisive moment. That's how things were. . . .

And at that moment, the people rallied and smashed the Germans. "Stick it out in the trenches!" In the West, they couldn't understand how the Russians managed to hold out. The explanation for the miracle was sought in *War and Peace*. And it was this same novel that inspired the Soviet people to beat back the enemy. So a "Tolstoian" theme occurred in real life. At that time, many of our newspapers had closed down owing to the paper shortage; there wasn't even any paper for the leaflets; but Lev Tolstoi's *War and Peace* was published in an edition of

one hundred thousand copies. In *The Conflagration*, one of my characters from not far away is bewildered by it all. "Nothing to roll a cigarette in, and look at all this luxury!"

It was because Lev Tolstoi came to life again everywhere during the Patriotic War that this theme had to be developed extensively in the novel. And the special significance of Tula, its proximity to Yasnaya Polyana, made it a very "convenient" locale for the action in *The Conflagration*.

Konstantin Alexandrovich, I would like to speak in defence of one of your characters. As an intellectual with the "baggage of a pre-revolutionary upbringing", Pastukhov should be classed as one of the people "disappearing from literature". But the conflict between conscience and situation with its frequent resolutions in moral compromise, which is the basis of his character, is absolutely real, contemporary, and not only in the literary world! What's more, if one thinks about it, it isn't only Pastukhov who goes through such trials in the trilogy; Tsvetukhin, in his traits of character and some of his behaviour seems to be a kind of "Pastukhov in reverse". . . .

Yes, Pastukhov, with his spiritual discord, is going to take up a lot of space. Dealing with him is going to be a difficult and tricky business. Of course, Pastukhov is not Startzev in *Cities and Years*, or Karev in *The Brothers*. He is one of the old intellectuals who went through everything "in their own way"—through errors and mistakes, to the acceptance of socialism. But he also has something new in him. He is capable of patriotic fervour. And Tsvetukhin can even die a heroic death. . . . The definite spiritual kinship between Pastukhov and Tsvetukhin is with me, a novelist, something akin to the leitmotif with a composer who distributes the same melody to the different instruments. The same line is given to the various timbres: the flute takes it up, then violin, then the bassoon—and the problem is resolved now by harmony, now by contrast, but always for the fullness of the whole.

The prose writer also is faced with the task of instrumentation. In literary criticism, for instance, as distinguished a researcher as M. Bakhtin has given this pheno-

menon in literature the name of “polyphonism”. It’s a good word, defining, perhaps, one of the reliable methods of the epic genre, or the way from contradiction to harmony. In my opinion, the writer’s job consists, not in taking the reader by the hand to one window and saying “Look!”, but in throwing wide open all the windows to show him the world in the multiplicity of its colours, flooded with the light of a future worthy of struggle in the name of humankind.

May, 1965

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